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VOL. 223.

DUST BY JULIAN HAWTHORNE.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

I.

HAMBURG
KARL GRÄDENER & J. F. RICHTER.
1883.

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VOL. I.

DUST

A NOVEL

BY

JULIAN HAWTHORNE

AUTHOR OF "GARTH" "SEBASTIAN STROME" ETC.

Only the actions of the Just
Smell sweet and blossom in the Dust.

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BIBLIOTHECA
REGIA
MONACENSIS

DUST.

CHAPTER I.

THE time at which this story begins was a time of many beginnings and many endings. The Eighteenth Century had expired the better part of a score of years before, and everything was in confusion. Youth—tumultuous, hearty, reckless, showy, slangy, insolent, kindly, savage—was the genius of the hour. The Iron Duke had thrashed the Corsican Ogre, England was the Queen of nations, and Englishmen thought so much of themselves and of one another, that Society, for all its caste, became well-nigh republican. Gentlemen were bruisers, and bruisers were gentlemen. At Ranelagh and Vauxhall fine ladies rubbed

shoulders with actresses, magistrates foregathered with jockeys and sharpers, and the guardians of public order had more to fear from young bloods and sprigs of nobility than from professional thieves and blacklegs. Costumes were grotesque and irrational, but were worn with a dash and effrontery that made them becoming. There were cocked hats and steeple-crowned hats; yards of neckcloth and mountains of coatcollar; green coats and blue coats, claret coats and white coats; four or five great-coats one on top of another; small-clothes and tight breeches, corduroys, hessians, and pumps. Beards were shaved smooth, and hair grew long. Young ladies wore drab josephs and flat-crowned beaver bonnets, and rode to balls on pillions, with their ball clothes in bandboxes. The lowest of necks were compensated by the shortest of waists; and the gleam of garterbuckles showed through the filmy skirts that scarcely reached to the ankle. Coral necklaces were the fashion, and silvery twilled silks and lace tuckers; and these fine things were laid up in lavender and rose-leaves. Hair was cropped short behind, and dressed with flat curls in front. Mob-caps and top-knotted caps, skull-caps and fronts, turbans and muslin kerchiefs, and puffed yellow satins—these things were a trifle antiquated, and belonged

to the elder generation. Gentlemen said, "Dammy, sir!" "Doosid," "Egad," "Stifle me!" "Monstrous fine," "Faith!' and "S'blood!" Ladies said, "Thank God!" "God A'mighty!" and "Law!" and everybody said "Genteel." Stage-coaches and post-horses occupied the place of railways and telegraphs; and driving was a fine art, and five hours from Brighton to London was monstrous slow going. Stage-coachmen were among the potentates of the day; they could do but one thing, but that they did perfectly; they were clannish among themselves, bullies to the poor, comrades to gentlemen, lickspittles to lords, and the high-priests of horse-flesh, which was at that epoch one of the most influential religions in England; pugilism being another, caste a third, and drunkenness the fourth. A snuff-box was still the universal wear, blue-pill was the specific for liver complaint, shopping was done in Cheape and Cornhill; fashionable bloods lodged in High Holborn, lounged at Bennet's and the Piazza Coffee-House, made calls in Grosvenor Square, looked in at a dog-fight, or to see Kemble, Siddons, or Kean in the evening, and finished the night over rack-punch and cards at the club. Literature was not much in vogue, though most people had read "Birron" and the "Monk," and many were familiar with the "Dialogues

of Devils," the "Arabian Nights," and "Zadkiel's Prophetic Almanac"; while the "Dairyman's Daughter" either had been written or soon was to be. Royalty and nobility showed themselves much more freely than they do now. George the Third was still King of England; and George, his son, was still the first gentleman and foremost blackguard of Europe; and everything, in short, was outwardly very different from what it is at the present day. Nevertheless, underneath all appearances, flowed then, as now, the mighty current of human nature. Then, as now, mothers groaned that infants might be born; poverty and wealth were married in every human soul, so that beggars were rich in some things and princes poor in others; young men and women fell in love, and either fell out again, or wedded, or took the law into their own hands, or jilted one another just as they do now. Men in power were tyrannous or just, pompous or simple, wise or foolish; and men in subjection were faithful or dishonest, servile or self-respectful, scheming or contented, then as now. Then, no less than now, some men broke one Commandment, some another, and some broke all; and the young looked forward to a good time coming, and the old prophesied misfortune. At that epoch, as in this, Death plied

his trade after his well-known fashion, which seems so cruel and arbitrary, and is so merciful and wise. And finally—to make an end of this summary—the human race was predestined to good, and the individual human being was free to choose either good or evil, the same then as now and always. And—to leave generalities and begin upon particulars—it was at this time that Mrs. Lockhart (who, seven-and-forty years ago, as lovely Fanny Pell, had cherished a passing ideal passion for Handsome Tom Grantley, and had got over it and married honest young Lieutenant Lockhart) —that Mrs. Lockhart, we say, having lost her beloved Major at Waterloo, and finding herself in somewhat narrow circumstances, had made up her mind to a new departure in life; and had, in accordance with this determination, caused her daughter Marion to write "Lodgings to Let" on a card, and to hang the same up in the window of the front drawing-room. This event occurred on the morning of the third of May, Eighteen hundred and sixteen.

CHAPTER II.

THAT same day the Brighton coach was bowling along the road to London at the rate of something over five minutes to the mile: a burly, much be-caped Jehu on the box, and a couple of passengers on the seat on either side of him. The four horses, on whose glistening coat the sunshine shifted pleasantly, seemed dwarfed by the blundering structure which trundled at their heels, and which occasionally swayed top-heavily from side to side, like a vessel riding the seas. Jehu had, for the time being, surrendered the reins to the young gentleman who sat beside him. The youth in question was fashionably dressed, so far as could be judged from the glimpes of his attire that showed beneath the layers of benjamins in which his rather diminutive person was enveloped. His narrow face wore a rakish but supercilious expression, which was enhanced by his manner of wearing a hat shaped like a truncated cone with a curled brim. He sat erect and square, with an

exaggerated dignity, as if the importance of the whole coach-and-four were concentrated in himself.

"You can do it, Mr. Bendibow—you can do it, sir," remarked Jehu, in a tone half-way between subservience and patronage. "You've go it in you, sir, and do you know why?"

"Well: to be sure, I've had some practice," said Mr. Bendibow, conscious of his worth, and pleased to have it commended; but, with the modesty of true genius, forbearing to admit himself miraculous.

Jehu shook his head solemnly. "Practice be damned, sir! What's practice, I ask, to a man what hadn't got it in him beforehand? It was in your blood, Mr. Bendibow, afore ever you was out of your cradle, sir. Because why? Because your father, Sir Francis—as fine a gen'leman and as open-handed as ever sat on a box was as good a whip as might be this side o'London, and I makes no doubt but what he is so to this day. That's what I say; and if any says different, why, I'm ready to back it." In uttering this challenge, Jehu stared about him with a hectoring air, but without meeting anyone's eye: as if defying things in general, but no one in particular.

"Is Sir Francis Bendibow still living? Pardon me the question; I formerly had some slight

acquaintance with the gentleman; but for a good many years past I have lived out of the country."

These were the first words that the speaker of them had uttered. He was a meagre, elderly man, rather shabbily dressed, and sat second from the coachman on the left. While speaking he leaned forward, allowing his visage to emerge from the bulwark of coat-collar that rose on either side of it. It was a remarkable face, though, at first sight, not altogether a winning one. The nose was an abrupt aquiline, thin at the bridge, but with distended nostrils; the mouth was straight, the lips seeming thin, rather from a constant habit of pressing them together, than from natural confirmation. The bony chin slanted forward aggressively, increasing the uncompromising aspect of the entire countenance. The eyebrows of a pale auburn hue, were sharply arched, and the eyes beneath were so widely opened that the whole circle of the iris was visible. The complexion of this personage, judging from the colour of the hair, should have been blonde; but, either owing to exposure to the air, or from some other cause, it was of a deep reddish-brown tint. His voice was his most attractive feature, being well modulated and of an agreeable though penetrating quality, and to some ears it might have been a guarantee

of the speaker's gentility strong enough to outweigh the indications of his somewhat threadbare costume.

"My father is in good health, to the best of my knowledge," said young Mr. Bendibow, glancing at the other and speaking curtly. Then he added, "You have the advantage of me, sir."

"I call myself Grant," returned the elderly man.

"Never heard my father mention the name," said Mr. Bendibow, loftily.

"I dare say not," replied Mr. Grant, relapsing into his coat-collar.

"Some folks," observed Jehu, in a meditative tone, yet loud enough to be heard by all—"some folks thinks to gain credit by speaking the names of those superior to them in station. Other folks thinks that fine names don't mend ragged breeches. I speaks my opinion, because why? Beause I backs it."

"You'd better mind your horses," said the gentleman who sat between the coachman and Mr. Grant. "There !—catch hold of my arm, sir!"

The last words were spoken to Mr. Grant, just as the coach lurched heavily to one side and toppled over. The off-leader had shied at a tall white

milestone that stood conspicuous at a corner of the road, and bofore Mr. Bendibow could gather up his reins, the right wheels of the vehicle had entered the ditch, and the whole machine was hurled off its balance into the hedgerow. The outside passengers, with the exception of one or two who clung to their seats, were projected into the field beyond, together with a number of boxes and portmanteaux. The wheels lost their footing and floundered in the ditch, while the leaders, struggling furiously, snapped their harness and careered down the road. From within the coach, meanwhile, proceeded the sound of feminine screams and lamentation.

The first thing clearly perceptible amidst the confusion was the tremendous oath of which the coachman delivered himself, as he upreared his ponderous bulk from the half-inanimate figure of young Mr. Bendibow; upon whom he had fallen, having himself received at the same time a smart blow on the ear from a flying carpet-bag. The next person to arise was Mr. Grant, who appeared to have escaped unhurt; and after a moment the gentleman who, by interposing himself between the other and danger, had broken his fall, also got to his feet, looking a trifle pale about the lips.

"I much fear, sir," said the elder man, with an accent of grave concern in his voice, "that I have been the occasion of your doing yourself an injury. You have saved my bones at the cost of your own. I am a bit of a surgeon: let me look at your arm."

"Not much harm done, I fancy," returned the other, forcing a smile. "There's something awkward here, though," he added the next moment. "A joint out of kilter, perhaps."

"I apprehended as much," said Mr. Grant. He passed his hand underneath the young man's coat. "Ay, there's a dislocation here," he continued; "but if you can bear a minute's pain, I can put it right again. We must get your coat off, and then . . . "

"Better get the ladies out of their cage first, that's not so much courtesy on my part as that I wish to put off the painful minute you speak of as long as may be. I'm a damnable coward—should sit down and cry if I were alone. Ladies first, for my sake!"

"You laugh, sir; but if the shoulder is not in place immediately, it may prove no laughing matter. The ladies are doing very well—they have found a rescuer already. Your coat off, if you please. What fools fashion makes of men! Where I come

rom none wear coats save Englishmen, and even they are satisfied with one. Ah! that was a twinge; it were best to cut the sleeve perhaps?"

"In the name of decency, no! To avoid trouble, I have long carried my wardrobe on my back, and 'twould never do to enter London with a shirt only. Better a broken bone than a wounded coat-sleeve—ha! well, this is for my sins, I suppose. I wish Providence would keep the punishment till all the sins are done—this piecemeal retribution is the devil. Well, now for it! Sir, I wish you were less humane—my flesh and bones cry out against your humanity. Dryden was wrong, confound him! Pity is akin to—to—whew!—to the Inquisition. God Apollo! shall I ever write poetry after this? And 'tis only a left arm, after all!—not to be left alone, however—ah! . . . A thousand thanks, sir: but you leave me ten years older than you found me. Our acquaintance has been a long and (candour compels me to say) a confoundedly painful one. To be serious, I am heartily indebted to you."

"Take a pull at this flask, young gentleman: 'tis good cognac, that I got as I came through France. I recollect to have read, when I was a boy in school, that Nero fiddled whilst Rome was burning: you seem to have a measure of his humour, since you can jest while the framework of your

mortal dwelling-place is in jeopardy. As for your indebtedness—my neck may be worth much or little, but, such as it is, you saved it. The balance is still against me."

"Leave balances to bankers: otherwise we might have to express our obligations to Mr. Bendibow, there, for introducing us to each other. Does no one here, besides myself; need your skill?"

"It appears not, to judge by the noise they make," replied the old gentleman drily. "That blackguard of a coachman should lose his place for this. The manners of these fellows have changed for the worse since I saw England last. How do you find yourself, Mr. —— I beg your pardon?"

"Lancaster is my name; and I feel very much like myself again," returned the other, getting up from the bank against which he had been reclining while the shoulder-setting operation had been going on, and stretching out his arms tentatively.

As he stood there, Mr. Grant looked at him with the eye of a man accustomed to judge of men. With his costume reduced to shirt, small-clothes, and hessians, young Lancaster showed to advantage. He was above the medium height, and strongly made, deep in the chest and elastic in the loins. A tall and massive white throat supported a head that seemed small, but was of remarkably

fine proportions and character. The contours of the face were, in some places, so refined as to appear feminine, yet the expression of the principal features was eminently masculine and almost bold. Large black eyes answered to the movements of a sensitive and rather sensuous mouth; the chin was round and resolute. The young man's hair was black and wavy, and of a length that, in our day, would be called effeminate; it fell apart at the temple in a way to show the unusual height and fineness of the forehead. The different parts of the face were fitted together compactly and smoothly, without creases, as if all had been moulded from one motive and idea—not as if composed of a number of inharmonious ancestral prototypes: yet the range of expression was large and vivid. The general aspect in repose indicated gravity and reticence; but as soon as a smile began, then appeared gleams and curves of a humorous gaiety. And there was a brilliance and concentration in the whole presence of the man which was within and distinct from his physical conformation, and which rendered him conspicuous and memorable.

"Lancaster—the name is not unknown to me," remarked Mr. Grant, but in an indrawn tone characteristic of a man accustomed to communing to himself.

During this episode, the other travellers had been noisily and confusedly engaged in pulling themselves together and discussing the magnitude of their disaster. Some labourers, whom the accident had attracted from a neighbouring field, were pressed into service to help in setting matters to rights. One was sent after the escaped horses; others lent their hands and shoulders to the task of getting the coach out of the ditch and replacing the luggage upon it. Mr. Bendibow, seated upon his portmanteau, his fashionable attire much outraged by the clayey soil into which he had fallen, maintained a demeanour of sullen indignation; being apparently of the opinion that the whole catastrophe was the result of a conspiracy between the rest of the passengers against his own person. The coachman, in a semi-apoplectic condition from the combined effects of dismay, suppressed profanity, and a bloody jaw, was striving with hasty and shaking fingers to mend the broken harness; the ladies were grouped together in the roadway in a shrill-complaining and hysteric cluster, protesting by turns that nothing should induce them ever to enter the vehicle again, and that unless it started at once their prospects of reaching London before dark would be at an end. Lancaster glanced at his companion with an arch smile.

"My human sympathies can't keep abreast of so much distress," said he. "I shall take myself off. Hammersmith cannot be more than three or four miles distant, and my legs will be all the better for a little stretching. If you put up at the 'Plough and Harrow' to-night, we may meet again in an hour or two; meantime I will bid you good-day; and, once more, many thanks for your surgery."

He held out his hand, into which Mr. Grant put his own. "A brisk walk will perhaps be the best thing for you," he remarked. "Guard against a sudden check of perspiration when you arrive; and bathe the shoulder with a lotion . . . by-the-by, would you object to a fellow-pedestrian? I was held to be a fair walker in my younger days, and I have not altogether lost the habit of it."

"It will give me much pleasure," returned the other, cordially.

"Then I am with you," rejoined the elder man.

They gave directions that their luggagge should be put down at the "Plough and Harrow," and set off together along the road without more ado.

CHAPTER III.

THEY had not made more than a quarter of a mile, when the tramp of hoofs and trundle of wheels caused them to turn round with an exclamation of surprise that the coach should so speedily have recovered itself. A first glance showed them, however, that the vehicle advancing towards them was a private carriage. Two of the horses carried postilions; the carriage was painted red and black; and as it drew near, a coat-of-arms was seen emblazoned on the door-panel. The turnout evidently belonged to a person of quality; and there was something in its aspect which suggested a foreign nationality. The two gentlemen stood on one side to let it pass. As it did so, Mr. Grand said, "The lady looked at you as if she knew you."

"Me! a lady?" returned Lancaster, who had been so occupied in watching the fine action of the leaders as to have had no eyes for the occupants of the carriage.

As he spoke, the carriage stopped a few rods

beyond them, and a lady, who was neither young nor beautiful, put her head out of the window and motioned to Lancaster with her lifted finger. Muttering an apology to his companion, the young man strode forward, wondering what new adventure might be in store for him. But on reaching the carriage-door, his wonder came to an end. There were two ladies inside, and only one of them was unbeautiful. The other was young and in every way attractive: her appearance and manner were those of a personage of distinction; her fair visage was alive with a subtle luminousness and mobility of expression, which made formality in her seem a playful grace rather than an artificial habit. The margin of her face was swathed in the soft folds of a silken hood; but a strand of reddish hair curled across her white forehead, and very penetrating eyes met with a laughing sparkle the eyes of Lancaster. He doffed his hat.

"Madame la Marquise! In England! Where is Monsieur——?"

"Hush! You are the same as ever—you meet me after six months, and instead of saying you are glad to see me, you ask where is the Marquis! *Ma foi!* I don't know where he is."

"Surely Madame la Marquise does not need to be told how glad I am——"

"Pshaw! don't 'Madame la Marquise' me, Philip Lancaster! Are we not old friends—old enough, eh? Tell me what you are doing walking along this road with that shabby old man?"

"Old gentleman, Madame la Marquise. The coach was upset.——"

"What! You were on that coach that we passed just now in the ditch? You were not hurt?"

"If it had not been for this shabby old gentleman, I might have been a cripple for life."

"O! I beg his pardon. Where do you go, then? To London?"

"Not so far. I shall look for lodgings in Hammersmith."

"Nonsense! Hammersmith? I never heard of such a place. What should you do there? You will live in London—near me—*n'est-ce pas*?"

"I have work to do. I must keep out of society for the present. You——"

"Listen! For the present, I keep out of society also. I am incognita. No one knows I am here; no one will know till the time comes. We shall keep each other's secrets. But we cannot converse here. Get in here beside me, and on the way I will tell you . . . something! Come!"

"You are very kind, but I have made my

arrangements; and, besides, I am engaged to walk with this gentleman. If you will tell me where I may pay my respects to you and Monsieur le Marquis—"

"You are very stupid! I shall tell you nothing unless you come into the carriage. Monsieur le Marquis is not here—he never will be here. I am . . . well, you need not stare so. What do you suppose I am, then?"

"You are very mysterious."

"I am nothing of the sort. I am . . . . a widow. There!"

Philip Lancaster lifted his eyebrows and bowed.

"What does that mean?" demanded the Marquise, sharply; "that you congratulate me?"

"By no means, madame."

She drew herself up haughtily, and eyed him for a moment. "It appears that your coach has upset you in more ways than one. I apologise for interrupting you in your walk. Beyond doubt, your friend there is very charming. You are impatient to say farewell to me."

"Nothing more than '*Au revoir*,' I hope."

She let her haughtiness slip from her like a garment, and, leaning forward, she touched, with

her soft fingers, his hand which rested upon the carriage door.

"You will come here and sit beside me, Philip? Yes?" Her eyes dwelt upon his with an expectation that was almost a command.

"You force me to seem discourteous," he said, biting his lips, "but——"

"There! do not distress yourself," she exclaimed with a laugh, and leaning back in her seat. "Adieu! I do not recognise you in England: in Paris you were not so much an Englishman. If we meet in Paris, perhaps we shall know each other again. Madame Cabot, have the goodness to tell the coachman to drive on." These words were spoken in French.

Madame Cabot, the elderly and unbeautiful lady already alluded to, who had sat during this colloquy with a face as unmoved as if English were to her the same as Choctaw, gave the order desired, the horsed started, and Philip Lancaster, left alone by the roadside, put on his hat, with a curve of his lip that was not either a smile or a sneer.

Mr. Grant, meanwhile, had strolled onward, and was now some distance down the road. He waited for Lancaster to rejoin him, holding his open snuff-box in his hand; and when the young

man came up, he offered him a pinch, which the latter declined. The two walked on together for several minutes in silence, Lancaster only having said, "I am sorry to have kept you waiting—an acquaintance whom I met abroad;" to which Mr. Grant had replied by a mere nod of the head. By-and-by, however, he said, in resumption of the conversation which had been going on previous to the Marquise's interruption:

"Is it many years, then, since you left England?"

"Seven or eight—long enough for a man of my age. But you have been absent even longer?"

"Yes; much has been changed since my time. It has been a period of changes. Now that Bonaparte is gone, we may hope for repose. England needs repose: so do I—though my vicissitudes have not been involved in hers. I have lived apart from the political embroglio. But you must have been in the midst of it. Did you see Waterloo?"

"Only the remains of it: I was a non-combatant. Major Lockhart—a gentleman I met in Paris, about three years ago, a fine fellow and a good soldier—we ran across each other again in Brussels, a few days before the battle. Lockhart was killed. He was a man of over sixty; was

married and had a grown-up daughter, I believe. He had been living at home with his family since '13, and had hoped to see no more fighting. When he did not come back with his regiment, I rode out to look for him, and found his body. That's all I know of Waterloo."

"You never bore arms yourself?"

"No. My father was a clergyman; not that that would make much difference; besides, he was not of the bookworm sort, and didn't object to a little foxhunting and sparring. But I have never believed in anything enough to fight for it. I am like the Duke in 'Measure for Measure'—a looker-on at life."

"Ah! I can conceive that such an occupation may be not less arduous than any. But do you confine yourself to that? Do you never record your impressions?—cultivate literature, for example?"

Lancaster's face flushed a little, and he turned his head towards his companion with a quick, inquiring look. "How came you to think of that?" he asked.

The old gentleman passed his hand down over his mouth and chin, as if to correct an impulse to smile. "It was but a chance word of your own, while I was at work upon your

shoulder-joint," he replied. "You let fall some word implying that you had written poetry. I am very slightly acquainted with modern English literature, and could not speak from personal knowledge of your works were you the most renowned poet of the day. Pardon me the liberty."

Lancaster looked annoyed for a moment; but the next moment he laughed. "You cannot do me a better service than to show me that I'm a fool," he said. "I'm apt to forget it. In theory, I care not a penny whether what I write is read or not; but I do care all the same. I pretend to be a looker-on at life from philosophical motives; but, in fact, it's nothing but laziness. I try to justify myself by scribbling poetry, and am pleased when I find that anyone has discovered my justification. But if I were really satisfied with myself, I should leave justification to whom it might concern."

"My existence has been passed in what are called practical affairs," Mr. Grant returned; "but I am not ready to say that, considered in themselves, they have as much real life in them as a single verse of true poetry. Poetry and music are things beyond my power to achieve, but not to enjoy. The experience of life which cannot

be translated into poetry or music, is a lifeless and profitless experience." He checked himself, and added in his usual tone: "I mean to say that, man of business though I am, I am not unacquainted with the writings of poets, and I take great delight in them. The wisest thing a man can do is, I apprehend, to augment the enjoyment of other men. Commerce and politics aim to develop our own wealth and power at the cost of others; but poetry, like love, gives to all, and asks for nothing except to be received."

"Have a care, or you will undo the service I just thanked you for. Besides, as a matter of fact, poetry in our days not only asks to be received, but to be received by publishers, and paid for!"

Something in the young man's manner of saying this, rather than the saying itself, seemed to strike Mr. Grant, for he glanced at the other with a momentary keenness of scrutiny, and presently said:

"Your father, I think you mentioned, was a clergyman?"

"He was Herbert Lancaster."

Mr. Grant halted for a moment in his walk, to extract his snuff-box from his pocket. After having taken a pinch, he again gave a sharp

look at his companion, and observed as he walked on:

"My prolonged absence from my native land has made my recollection of such matters a little rusty, but am I mistaken in supposing there is a title in the family?"

"My uncle is Lord Croftus—the fifth baron."

"Ah! precisely: yes, yes. Then, was it not your father who married a daughter of the Earl of Seabridge? or am I confounding him with another?"

"You are quite right. He married the youngest daughter, Alice; and I am their only child, for lack of a better."

"Ah! Very singular," returned Mr. Grant; but he did not explain in what the singularity consisted.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. LOCKHART'S house at Hammersmith had been considered a good house in its day, and was still decent and comfortable. It stood on a small side street which branched off from the main road

in the direction of the river, and was built of dark red brick, with plain white-sashed windows. It occupied the centre of an oblong plot of ground about half an acre in extent, with a high brick wall all round it, except in front, where space was left for a wrought-iron gate, hung between two posts, with an heraldic animal of ambiguous species sitting upright on each of them. The straight path which led from this gate to the front door of the house, was paved with broad square flagstones, kept very clean. In the midst of the grass-plot on the left, as you entered, was a dark-hued cedar of Lebanon, whose flattened layers of foliage looked out of keeping with the English climate and the character of English trees. At the back of the house was an orchard, comprising three ancient apple-trees and the lifeless stump of a fourth; some sunflowers and hollyhocks, alternating with gooseberry-bushes, were planted along the walls, which, for the most part, where draped in ivy. The interior of the building showed a wide hall, giving access to a staircase, which, after attaining a broad landing, used as a sort of open sitting-room, and looking out through a window upon the back garden, mounted to the region of bedrooms. The ground floor was divided into three rooms and a kitchen, all of comfortable

dimensions, and containing sober and presentable furniture. In the drawing-room, moreover, hung a portrait, taken in 1805, of the deceased master of the establishment; and a miniature of the same gentleman, in a gold-rimmed oval frame, reposed upon Mrs. Lockhart's work-table. The sideboard in the dining-room supported a salver and some other articles of plate which had belonged to Mrs. Lockhart's family, and which, when she surrendered her maiden name of Fanny Pell, had been included in her modest dowry. For the rest, there was a small collection of books, ranged on some shelves sunk into the wall on either side the drawing-room mantel-piece; and fastened against the walls were sundry spoils of war, such as swords, helmets, and flint-lock muskets, which the Major had brought home from his campaigns. Their stern and battle-worn aspect contrasted markedly with the gentle and quiet demeanour of the dignified old lady who sat at the little table by the window, with her sewing in her hands.

Mrs. Lockhart, as has been already intimated, had been a very lively girl, and, allowing for the modifications wrought by age, she had not, at sixty-six, lost the essential charm which had distinguished her at sixteen. Her social success had, during four London seasons, been especially

brilliant; and, although her fortune was at no time great, she had received many highly eligible offers of marriage; and His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales had declared her to be "a doosid sweet little creature." She had kept the citadel of her heart through many sieges, and, save on one occasion, it had never known the throb of passion up to the period of her marriage with Lieutenant Lockhart. But two years previous to that event, being then in her eighteenth year, she had crossed the path of the famous Tom Grantley, who, at four-and-thirty years of age, had not yet passed the meridian of his renown. He was of Irish family and birth, daring, fascinating, generous, and dangerous with both men and women; accounted one of the handsomest men in Europe, a fatal duellist, a reckless yet fortunate gambler, a well-nigh irresistible wooer in love, and in political debate an orator of impetuous and captivating eloquence. His presence and bearing were lofty and superb; and he was one of those whose fiat in matters of fashion was law. When only twenty-one years old, he had astonished Society by eloping with Edith, the eldest daughter of the Earl of Seabridge, a girl not less remarkable for beauty than for a spirit and courage which were a match for Tom Grantley's own. The Earl had

never forgiven this wild marriage, and, Tom having already seriously diminished his patrimony by extravagance, the young couple were fain to make a more than passing acquaintance with the seamy side of life. But loss of fortune did not, for them, mean loss either of heart or of mutual love, and during the five years of their wedded existence there was nowhere to be found a more devoted husband than Tom Grantley, or a wife more affectionate and loyal than Lady Edith. And when she died leaving him an only child, it was for some time a question whether Tom would not actually break his heart.

He survived his loss, however, and, having inherited a fresh fortune from a relative, he entered the world again and dazzled it once more. But he was never quite the same man as previously; there was a sternness and bitterness underlying his character which had not formerly been perceptible. During the ensuing ten years he was engaged in no fewer than thirteen duels, in which it was generally understood that the honour of some unlucky lady or other was at stake, and in most of these encounters he either wounded or killed his man. In his thirteenth affair he was himself severely wounded, the rapier of his antagonist penetrating the right lung; the wound

healed badly, and probably shortened his life by many years, though he did not die until after reaching the age of forty. At the time of his meeting with Fanny Pell he was moving about London, a magnificent wreck of a man, with great melancholy blue eyes, a voice sonorously musical, a manner and address of grave and exquisite courtesy. Gazing upon that face, whose noble beauty was only deepened by the traces it bore of passion and pain, Fanny Pell needed not the stimulus of his ominous reputation to yield him first her awed homage, and afterwards her heart. But Tom, on this occasion, acted in a manner which, we may suppose, did something towards wiping away the stains of his many sins. He had been attracted by the gentle charm of the girl, and for a while he made no scruple about attracting her in turn. There was a maidenly dignity and straightforwardness about Fanny Pell, however, which, while it won upon Grantley far more than did the deliberate and self-conscious fascinations of other women, inspired at the same time an unwonted relenting in his heart. Feeling that here was one who might afford him something vastly deeper and more valuable than the idle pride of conquest and possession with which he was only too familiar, he bethought himself to

show his recognition of the worth of that gift in the only way that was open to him—by rejecting it. So, one day looking down from his majestic height into her lovely girlish face, he said with great gentleness, "My dear Miss Fanny, it has been very kind of you to show so much goodness to a broken-down old scamp like myself, who's old enough to be your father; and faith! I feel like a father to ye, too! Why, if I had a little girl instead of a boy, she might have had just such a sweet face as yours, my dear. So you'll not take it ill of me—will ye now?—if I just give you a kiss on the forehead before I go away. Many a woman have I seen and forgotten, who'll, maybe, not forget me in a hurry; but your fair eyes and tender voice I never will forget, for they've done more for me than ever a father confessor of 'em all! Good-bye, dear child; and if ever any man would do ye wrong—though, sure, no man that has as much heart as a fish would do that—tell him to 'ware Tom Grantley! and as true as there's a God in heaven, and a Tom Grantley on earth, I'll put my bullet through the false skull of him! That's all, my child: only, when ye come to marry some fine honest chap, as soon ye will, don't forget to send for your old friend Tom to come and dance at your wedding."

Poor Fanny felt as if her heart were being a cn out of her innocent bosom; but she was by nature so quiet in all her ways, that all she did was to stand with her glistening eyes uplifted towards the splendid gentleman, her lips tremulous, and her little hands hanging folded before her. And Tom, who was but human after all, and had begun to fear that be had undertaken at least as much as he was capable of performing, kissed her, not on her forehead, but on her mouth, and therewith took his leave hurriedly, and without much ceremony; and Fanny never saw him again; but she never forgot him, nor he her; though two years afterwards she married Lieutenant Lockhart, and was a faithful and loving wife to him for five-and-forty years. The honest soldier never thought of asking why she named their first child Tom; and and when the child died, and Mrs. Lockhart put on mourning, it never occurred to him that Tom Grantley's having died in the same month of the same year had deepened the fold of his wife's crape. But so it is that the best of us have our secrets, and those who are nearest to us suspect it not.

For the rest, Mrs. Lockhart's life was a sufficiently adventurous and diversified one. War was a busy and a glorious profession in those days; and the sweet-faced lady accompanied her

husband on several of his campaigns, cheerfully enduring any hardships of suspense and fear. During that time, when the nations paused for a moment to watch France cut off her own head as a preliminary to entering upon a new life, Captain Lockhart (as he was then) and his wife happened to be on that side of the Channel, and saw many terrible historical sights; and the Captain, who was no friend to evolution in any shape, improved an opportunity for doing a vital service for a distinguished French nobleman, bringing the latter safely to England at some risk to his own life. A year or two later Mrs. Lockhart's second child was born, this time a daughter; and then followed a few summers and winters of comparative calm, the monotony of which was only partially relieved by such domestic events as the trial of Warren Hastings, the acting of Kemble, and the classic buffoonery of Grimaldi. Then the star of Nelson began to kindle, and Captain Lockhart, reading the news, kindled also, and secretly glanced at his honourable sword hanging upon the wall; yet not so secretly but that his wife detected and interpreted theglance, and kissed her daughter with a sigh. And it was not long before Arthur Wellesley went to Spain, and Captain Lockhart, along with many thousand other loyal Englishmen, followed

him thither; and Mrs. Lockhart and Marion stayed behind and waited for news. The news that chiefly interested her was that her husband was promoted to be Major for gallant conduct on the field of battle; then that he was coming home. Home he came, accordingly, a glorious invalid; but even this was not to be the end of trouble and glory. England still had need of her best men, and Major Lockhart was among those who were responsible for the imprisonment of the Corsican Ogre in St. Helena. It was between this period and the sudden storm that culminated at Waterloo, that the happiest time of all the married life of the Lockharts was passed. He had saved a fair sum of money, with part of which he bought the house in Hammersmith; and upon the interest of the remainder, in addition to his half-pay, he was able to carry on existence with comfort and respectability. Marion was no longer the odd little creature in short skirts that she had been when the Major kissed her good-bye on his departure for the Peninsular War, but a well-grown and high-spirited young lady, with the features of her father, and a character of her own. She was passionately devoted to the grey-haired veteran, and was never tired of listening to his famous histories; of cooking his favourite dishes; of cutting

tobacco for his pipe; of sitting on the arm of his chair, with her arm about his neck, and her cheek against his. "Marion has the stuff of a soldier in her," the Major used to declare; whereupon the mother would silently thank Providence that Marion was not a boy. It had only been within the last five or six years that Marion had really believed that she was not, or might not become, a boy after all, a not uncommon hallunication with those who are destined to become more than ordinarily womanly.

When the event occurred which widowed France of her Emperor and Mrs. Lockhart of her husband (much the worse catastrophe of the two, in that lady's opinion), the prospects of the household in Hammersmith seemed in no respect bright. The Major's half-pay ceased with the Major, and the widow's pension was easier to get in theory than in practice. The interest of the small capital was not sufficient by itself to meet the current expenses, though these were conducted upon the most economical scale; and Marion, upon whose shoulders all domestic cares devolved, was presently at her wits' end how to get on. She did all the cooking herself, and much of the washing, though Mrs. Lockhart strongly protested against the latter, because Marion's hands were of remarkably fine

shape and texture, being, in fact, her chief beauty from the conventional point of view, and washing would make them red and ugly. Marion affirmed, with more sincerity than is commonly predicable of such sayings, that her hands were made to use, and that she did not care about them except as they were useful; and she went on with her washing in spite of protestations. But even this did not cover deficiencies; and then there was the wardrobe question. Marion, however, pointed out that, in the first place, she had enough clothes on hand to last her for a long time, especially as she had done growing; and, secondly, that she could easily manage all necessary repairs and additions herself. To this Mrs. Lockhart replied that young ladies must be dressed like young ladies; that good clothes were a necessary tribute to good society; and that in order to be happily and genteelly married, a girl must make the most of her good points, and subdue her bad ones, by the adornments of costume. This was, no doubt, very true; but marriage was a thing which Marion never could hear proposed, even by her own mother, with any patience; and as a consequence, to use marriage as an argument in support of dress, was to ensure the rejection of the argument. Marriage, said Marion, was, to begin with, a thing to which

her whole character and temperament were utterly opposed. She was herself too much like a man ever to care for a man, or not to despise him. In the next place, if a girl had not enough in her to win an honest man's love, in spite of any external disadvantages, then the best thing for her would be not to be loved at all. Love, this young dissenter, would she go on to observe, is something sacred, if it is anything; and so pure and sensitive, that it were infinitely better to forego it altogether than to run the least risk of getting it mixed up with any temporal or expedient considerations. And since, she would add, it seems to be impossible nowadays ever to get love in that unsullied and virginal condition, she for her part intended to give it a wide berth if ever it came in her way—which she was quite sure it never would; because it takes two to make a bargain, and not only would she never be one of the two, but, if she were to be so—she thanked God that she had so ugly a face and so unconciliating a temper that no man would venture to put up with her; unless, perhaps, she were possessed of five or ten thousand a year; from which misfortune it was manifestly the beneficent purpose of Providence to secure her. The upshot of this diatribe was that she did not care how shabby and ungenteel her clothes were,

so long as they were clean and covered her; and that even if she could afford to hire a dressmaker, she would still prefer to do her making and mending herself; because no one so well as herself could comprehend what she wanted.

"You should not call yourself ugly, Marion," her mother would reply: "at any rate, you should not think yourself ugly. A girl generally appears to others like what she is in the habit of thinking herself to be. Half the women who are called beauties are not really beautiful; but they have persuaded themselves that they are so, and then other people believe it. People in this world so seldom take the pains to think or to judge for themselves; they take what is given to them. Besides, to think a thing really does a great deal towards making it come true. If you think you are pretty, you will grow prettier every day. And if you keep on talking about being ugly . . . . You have a very striking, intelligent face, my dear; and your smile is very charming indeed."

Marion laughed scornfully. "Believing a lie is not the way to invent truth," she said. "All the imagination in England won't make me different from what I am. Whether I am ugly or not, I'm not a fool, and I shan't give anybody the right to call me one by behaving as if I fancied I were

somebody else. I am very well as I am," she continued, wringing out a towel and spreading it out on the clothes-horse to dry. "I should be too jealous and suspicious to make a man happy, and I don't mean to try it. You don't understand that; but you were made to be married, and I wasn't, and that's the reason."

Nevertheless the income continued to be insufficient, and inroads continued to be made on the capital, much to the friendly distress of Sir Francis Bendibow, the head of the great banking house of Bendibow Brothers, to whose care the funds of the late Major Lockhart had been entrusted. "The first guinea you withdraw from your capital, my dear madam," he had assured Mrs Lockhart, with his usual manner of impressive courtesy, "represents your first step on the road that leads to bankruptcy." The widow admitted the truth of the maxim; but misfortunes are not always curable in proportion as they are undeniable: though that seemed to be Sir Francis's assumption. Mrs. Lockhart began to suffer from her anxieties. Marion saw this, and was in despair. "What a good-for-nothing thing a woman is!" she exclaimed bitterly. "If I were a man, I would earn our living." She understood something of music, and sang and played with great refinement

and expression; but her talent in this direction was natural, not acquired, and she was not sufficiently grounded in the science of the accomplishment to have any chance of succeeding as a teacher. What was to be done?

"What do you say to selling the house and grounds, and going into lodgings?" she said one day.

"It would help us for a time, but not for always," the mother replied. "Lodgings are so expensive."

"The house is a great deal bigger than we need," said Marion.

"We should be not better off if it were smaller," said Mrs. Lockhart.

There was a long pause. Suddenly Marion jumped to her feet, while the light of inspiration brightened over her face. "Why, mother, what is to prevent us letting our spare rooms to lodgers?" she cried out.

"Oh, that would be impossible!" returned the mother in dismay. "The rooms that your dear father used to live in!"

"That is what we must do," answered Marion firmly: and in the end, as we have seen, that was what they did.

CHAPTER V.

THE third of May passed away, and, beyond the hanging up in the window of the card with "Lodgings to Let" written on it, nothing new had happened in the house at Hammersmith. But the exhibition of that card had been to Mrs. Lockhart an event of such momentous and tragic importance, that she did not know whether she were most astonished, relieved, or disappointed that it had produced no perceptible effect upon the outer universe.

"It seems to be of no use," she said to her daughter, while the latter was assisting her in her morning toilette. "Had we not better take down the card, and try to think of something else? Couldn't we keep half-a-dozen fowls, and sell the eggs?"

"How faint-hearted you are, mother!"

"Besides, even if somebody were to pass here who wanted lodgings, they could never think of looking through the gate; and if they did, I doubt whether they could see the card."

"I have thought of that; and, when I got up this morning, I tied the card to the gate itself. Nobody can fail to see it there."

"Oh, Marion! It is almost as if we were setting up a shop."

"Everybody is more or less a shopkeeper," replied Marion philosophically. "Some people sell rank, others beauty, others cleverness, others their souls to the devil: we might do worse than sell house-room to those who want it."

"Oh, my dear!"

"Bless your dear heart! you'll think nothing of it, once the lodgers are in the house," rejoined the girl, kissing her mother's cheek.

They went down to breakfast: it was a pleasant morning; the sky was a tender blue, and the eastern sunshine shot through the dark limbs of the cedar of Lebanon, and fell in cheerful patches on the floor of the dining-room, and sent a golden shaft across the white breakfast-cloth, and sparkled on the silver teapot—the same tea-pot in which Fanny Pell had once made tea for handsome Tom Grantley in the year 1768. Marion was in high spirits: at all events, she adopted a lightsome tone, in contrast to her usual somewhat grave preoccupation. She was determined to make her mother smile.

"This is our last solitary breakfast," she declared. "To-morrow morning we shall sit down four to table. There will be a fine old gentleman for me, and a handsome young man for you; for anybody would take you to be the younger of us two. The old gentleman will be impressed with my masculine understanding and knowledge of the world; we shall talk philosophy, and history, and politics; he will finally confess to a more than friendly interest in me; but I shall stop him there, and remind him that, for persons of our age, it is most prudent not to marry. He will allow himself to be persuaded on that point; but he has a vast fortune, and he will secretly make his will in my favour. Your young gentleman will be of gentle blood, a sentimentalist and an artist; his father will have been in love with you; the son will have the good taste to inherit the passion; he will entreat you to let him paint your portrait; but, if he becomes too pressing in his attentions, I shall feel it my duty to take him aside, and admonish him like a mother. He will be so mortally afraid of me, that I shall have no difficulty in managing him. In the course of a year or two——"

"Is not that somebody? I'm sure I heard—"

"La, mother, don't look so scared!" cried

Marion, laughing, but colouring vividly: "it can't be anything worse than an executioner with a warrant for our arrest." She turned in her chair, and looked through the window and across the grass-plot to the gate.

"There is somebody—two gentlemen—just as I said: one old and the other young."

"Are you serious, Marion?" said the widow, interlacing her fingers across her breast, while her lips trembled.

"They are reading the card: the old one is holding a pair of gold-rimmed eye-glasses across his nose. Now they are looking through the gate at the house: the young one is saying something, and the other is smiling and taking snuff. The young one has a small head, but his eyes are big, and he has broad shoulders: he looks like an artist, just as I said. The old one stoops a little and is ugly; but I like his face—it's honest. He doesn't seem to be very rich, though; his coat is very old-fashioned. Oh, they are going away!"

"Oh, I am so glad!" exclaimed Mrs. Lockhart fervently.

"No, they are coming back—they are coming in: the young one is opening the gate. Here

they come: that young fellow is certainly very handsome. There!"

A double knock sounded through the house.

"Say we are not at home—oh, they must not come in! Tell them to call another day. Perhaps they may not have called about the lodgings," faltered the widow, in agitation.

Marion said nothing; being, to tell the truth, engaged in screwing her own courage to the sticking-point. After a pause of a few moments she marched to the door, with a step so measured and deliberate as to suggest stern desperation rather than easy indifference. Passing into the hall, and closing the door behind her, she threw open the outer door and faced the two intruders.

The elder gentleman stood forward as spokesman. "Good morning to you," he said, glancing observantly at the young woman's erect figure. "You have lodgings to let, I believe?"

"Yes."

"This gentleman and I are in search of lodgings. Is the accommodation sufficient for two? We should require separate apartments."

"You can come in and see." She made way for them to enter, and conducted them into the sitting-room on the left.

"You had better speak to your mistress, my dear, or to your master, if he is at home, and say we would like to speak to him." This was said by the younger man.

Marion looked at him with a certain glow of fierceness. "My father is not living," she said. "There is no need to disturb my mother. I can show you over the house myself."

"I ask your pardon sincerely. It has always been my foible to speak before I look. I took it for granted——"

"I don't suppose you intended any harm, sir," said Marion coldly. "If we could have afforded a servant to attend the door, we should not have been forced to take lodgers." She turned to the elder man and added: "We have three vacant rooms on the top story. You might divide the accommodation to suit yourselves. You can come upstairs, if you like, and see whether they would suit you."

The gentlemen assented, and followed Marion over the upper part of the house. The elder man examined the rooms and the furniture with care; but the younger kept his regards fixed rather upon the guide than upon what she showed them. Her gait, the movements of her arms, the carriage of her head, her tone and manner of

speaking, all were subjected to his scrutiny. He said little, but took care that what he did say should be of a courteous and conciliatory nature. The elder man asked questions pleasantly, and seemed pleased with the answers Marion gave him. Within a short time the crudity and harshness of the first part of the interview began to vanish, and the relations of the three became more genial and humane. There was here and there a smile, and once, at least, a laugh. Marion, who was always quick to recognise the humorous aspect of a situation, already foresaw herself making her mother merry with an account of this adventure, when the heroes of it should have gone away. The party returned to the sitting-room in a very good humour with one another, therefore.

"For my part, I am more than satisfied," remarked the elder gentleman, taking out his snuff-box. "Do you agree with me, Mr. Lancaster?"

Lancaster did not reply. He was gazing with great interest at the oil portrait that hung on the wall. At length he turned to Marion and said: "Is that——May I ask who that is?"

"My father."

"Was he a major in the 97th regiment?"

"Did you know him?"

"I knew Major Lockhart. He—of course you know—he fell at Waterloo."

"We know that he was killed there, but we have no particulars," said Marion, her voice faltering, and her eyes full of painful eagerness.

"And you are Miss Lockhart—the Marion he spoke of?"

"Wait a moment," she said, in a thick voice, and turning pale. She walked to the window, and pressed her forehead against the glass. Presently she turned round and said, "I will call my mother, sir. She must hear what you have to tell us:" and left the room.

"A strange chance this!" remarked the elder man thoughtfully.

"She is a fine girl, and looks like her father," said Lancaster.

In a few moments Marion re-entered with her mother. Mrs. Lockhart looked from one to the other of the two men with wide-open eyes and flushed cheeks: a slight tremor pervaded the hand with which she mechanically smoothed the thick braids of grey hair that covered her graceful head. She moved with an uncertain step to a chair, and said in a voice scarcely audible, "Will

you be seated, gentlemen? My daughter tells me that you—one of you——"

"The honour belongs to me, madam," said Lancaster, with deep respect and with some evidence of emotion, "of having seen your husband the day before his death. He mentioned both of you; he said no man in the army had had so happy a life as he—such a wife and such a daughter. I shall remember other things that he said, by-and-by; but this meeting has come upon me by surprise, and . . . . The day after the battle I rode out to the field, and found him. He had fallen most gallantly—I need not tell you that—at a moment such as all brave soldiers would wish to meet death in. He was wounded through the heart, and must have died instantly. I assumed the privilege of bringing his body to Brussels, and of seeing it buried there." Here he paused, for both the women were crying, and, in sympathy with them, his own voice was getting husky. The elder man sat with his face downcast, and his hands folded between his knees.

"Is the grave marked?" he suddenly asked, looking up at Lancaster.

"Yes; the name, and the regiment, and the date.—I brought something from him," he went on, addressing Marion, as being the stronger of

the two women; "it was fastened by a gold chain round his neck, and he wore it underneath his coat. You would have received it long ago, if I had known where to find you." He held out to her, as he spoke, a small locket with its chain. Marion took it, and held it pressed between her hands, not saying anything. After a moment, the two gentlemen exchanged a glance, and got up. The elder gentleman approached Marion with great gentleness of manner; and, when she rose and attempted to speak, he put his hand kindly on her shoulder.

"I had a little girl once, who loved me," he said. "You must let me go without ceremony now; to-morrow I shall ask leave to come back and complete our arrangements. God bless you, my child! Are you going with me, Mr. Lancaster?"

"Shall you come back to-morrow, too?" said Marion to the latter.

"Indeed I will!"

"Then I won't try to thank you now," she replied. But their eyes met for a moment, and Lancaster did not feel that recognition of his service had been postponed.

They were going out without attempting to take leave of Mrs. Lockhart; but she rose up from

her chair and curtseyed to them with a grace and dignity worthy of Fanny Pell. And then yielding to an impulse that was better than the high-breeding, the gentle widow stepped quickly up to Lancaster, and put her arms about his neck and kissed him.

CHAPTER VI.

THE great banking house of Bendibow Brothers, like many other great things, had a modest beginning. At the beginning of the eighteenth century there was a certain Mr. Abraham Bendibow in London, who kept a goldsmith's shop in the neighbourhood of Whitechapel, and supplemented the profits of that business by lending money at remunerative interest, on the security of certain kinds of personal property. To his customers and casual acquaintances he was merely a commonplace, keen, cautious, hard-hearted man of business; and, perhaps, till as lately as the second decade of the century, this might have fairly represented his own opinion of himself. Nevertheless, there lurked in his character, in addition to the qualities above-mentioned, two others which are by no means commonplace, namely, imagination and enter-

prise. They might have lurked there unsuspected till the day of his death, but for the intervention of circumstances—to make use of a convenient word of which nobody has ever explained the real meaning. But in 1711, that ingenious nobleman, the Earl of Oxford, being animated by a praiseworthy desire to relieve a nightmare of half-a-score million sterling or so of indebtedness which was then oppressing the Government, hit upon that famous scheme which has since entered into history under the name the South-Sea Bubble. The scheme attracted Bendibow's attention, and he studied it for some time in his usual undemonstrative but thorough-going manner. Whenever occasion offered he discussed it, in an accidental and indifferent way, with all kinds of people. At the end of two or three years he probably understood more about the affair than any other man in London. Whether he believed that it was a substance or a bubble will never be known to anyone except himself. All that can be affirmed is that he minded his own business, and imparted his opinion to no one. The opinion gradually gained ground that he shared the views of Sir Robert Walpole, who, in the House of Commons, was almost the only opposer of the South-Sea scheme. So matters went on until the year 1720.

It was at this period that the excitement and convulsion began. The stock had risen to 330. Ahraham Bendibow sat in his shop, and preserved an unruffled demeanour. The stock fell to below 300; but Abraham kept his strong-box locked, and went about his business as usual. Stock mounted again to 340; but nobody perceived any change in Mr. Bendibow. For all anyone could see, he might never have heard of the South-Sea scheme in his life. And yet a great fortune was even then in his grasp, had he chosen to stretch out his hand to take it.

Weeks and months passed away, and the stock kept on rising. Often it would tremble and fall, but after each descent it climbed higher than before. It became the one absorbing topic of conversation with everybody except Abraham Bendibow, who composedly professed to have no concern in the matter: it was not for small tradesmen like him to meddle with such large enterprises. And meanwhile, the stock rose and rose, and rose higher still, until men lost their heads, and other men made colossal fortunes, and everybody expected to secure at least ten thousand a-year. One day the stock touched 890, and then people held their breath and turned pale, and the

most sanguine said in their hearts that this was supernatural and could not last.

On that day Abraham Bendibow went into his private room, and locked the door; and, taking pen and paper, he made a calculation. After having made it, he sat for a long time gazing at the little array of figures in seeming abstraction. Then he leaned back in his chair, with one hand in the pocket of his small-clothes, while with the other he slowly rubbed his chin at intervals. By degrees he began to breathe more quickly, and his eyes became restless. He arose from his chair and paced up and down the room. "Eight hundred and ninety," he kept muttering to himself, over and over again. The strong-box stood in the corner of the room, and towards this Mr. Bendibow often looked. Once he approached it, and laid his hand upon the lid; then he turned away from it with an abrupt movement, compressing his lips and shaking his head. He resumed his pacing up and down the room, his head bent down in deep and troubled thought, At last an idea seemed to strike him. He unlocked and opened the door of the room, and called in a harsh, peremptory tone,

"Jacob!"

A young man appeared, about twenty years of age. In features he resembled the other, but his face was not so broad, nor was his air so commanding. Mr. Bendibow motioned to him with his head to enter. He then seated himself in his chair, and eyed Jacob for a while in silence. Jacob stood with his head stretched forward, and slowly chafing the back of one hand with the palm of the other, while his countenance wore an expression of deferential inquiry.

"Jacob", said the elder, "what is doing out-doors to-day—eh?"

"The same as usual, father," answered Jacob tentatively, as being in some doubt what the question might portend. "There is plenty of excitement: same as usual."

"Excitement; on what account?"

"Well, sir, the stocks: terrible speculation: madness—nothing less. There was a fellow, sir, this very morning, got out a prospectus of a company for prosecuting a certain undertaking not at present to be revealed: capital one million, in ten thousand shares of one hundred each; deposit two pounds, entitling to one hundred per annum per share: particulars next week, and balance of subscription week after next. Frightful, upon my soul, sir!"

"Has anybody bitten?"

"A good many have been bitten," returned Jacob, with a dry giggle. "Three thousand pounds were subscribed in three hours; and then the fellow decamped. Madness, upon my life!"

"You would not advise having anything to do with such speculations—eh, Jacob?"

"Me? Bless my soul, not I indeed!" exclaimed Jacob with energy.

"Why not?"

"In the first place, because you have expressed disapproval of it, father," replied the virtuous Jacob. "And I may flatter myself I have inherited something of your sound judgment."

"So, you have never speculated at all—eh, Jacob? Never at all, eh? Never bought a shilling's-worth of stock of any kind in your life—eh? The truth, Jacob!"

The last words were pronounced in so stern a tone that Jacob changed colour, turning his eyes first to one side of his father's point-blank gaze, and then to the other. At last, however, their glances met, and then Jacob said: "I might not be able to swear to a shilling or so, neither——"

"Nor to a guinea: nor to ten, nor to fifty—eh, Jacob?"

"Not more than fifty; upon my soul, sir,"

said Jacob, laying his hands upon his heart in earnest deprecation. "Not a penny, sir; upon my word of honour!"

"What of the fifty, then—eh?"

"It was in South-Sea: I bought at 400," said Jacob, in a low voice.

"At 400? And what is it to-day?"

"Eight hundred and ninety it was this morning," said Jacob, uttering the words with great distinctness.

"Was this morning? Do you mean it has fallen since?"

"It has, indeed, sir. They've all been selling like demons; and it's below eight hundred at this moment."

"What have you done—eh?"

"Sold out the first thing, sir, at four hundred and ninety per cent, clear profit," replied Jacob, something of complacency mingling with the anxious deference of his tone.

"Therefore, instead of fifty pounds, you now have three hundred or so?"

"Two hundred and ninety-five, sir," said the youth modestly.

"Jacob, you are a fool!"

"Sir?"

"You have thrown your money away. You are a fool! You are timid! You have neither the genius, the steadiness, nor the daring to manage and to multiply a great fortune. Were you like myself, Jacob, you or your children might have a hand in controlling the destinies of England, and thus of the world. You have behaved like a pettifogger and a coward, Jacob. I do not ask you to be honest. No man is honest when he is sure that dishonesty will enrich him. But, whatever you are, I ask you to be that thing with all your soul. Be great, or be nothing! Only fools and cowards palter about morality! I tell you that success is the only morality." Here Mr. Bendibow, who had spoken with calmness, though by no means without emphasis, checked himself, and, putting his hand in his pocket, drew forth a key, which he handed to his son. "Open the strong-box," he said, "and take out the papers you will find in it."

Jacob did as he was bid. But his first glance at the papers made him start and stare in a bewildered manner at the unmoved countenance of his father. He then reverted to the papers; but, after a close inspection of them, he seemed only more bewildered than before.

"This is South-Sea stock," sir, he said at length.

"Well, Jacob?" said Mr. Bendibow composedly.

"Nigh on fifteen thousand pounds worth at par, sir."

"Yes, Jacob."

"I see how it is—you have been buying for some one?" broke out Jacob energetically.

"Evidently, Jacob."

There was a pause. "On commission, of course?" hazarded Jacob.

"No commission at all, Jacob."

Jacobs' jaws relaxed. "No commission? Whom did you buy for, sir?"

"For myself, Jacob."

Jacob dropped the papers on the table, and leaned against it dizzily: his breath forsook him. Finally, Mr. Bendibow said: "Jacob, you are even more a fool than I took you for."

"But how . . . . when did you buy, sir?" faltered Jacob.

"Eight or nine years ago," Mr. Bendibow replied.

"Then . . . . why, then you must have got it at under two hundred?"

"Eighty to a hundred and twenty," said Mr. Bendibow curtly.

There was another pause. Jacob moistened his lips and passed his hand over his forehead. Suddenly he screamed out, "But you haven't sold, sir!"

"Well, Jacob?"

"If you'd sold this morning you'd have been worth a hundred and thirty-five thousand sterling —one hundred and thirty-five thousand!"

"Very nearly, Jacob."

"And stock is falling: you've lost fifteen thousand since ten o'clock!" shouted Jacob, now quite beside himself. He seized the papers again, and made for the door. There he was stopped by an iron grasp on his arm, and Mr. Bendibow said in a voice as uncompromising as his grasp, "Stay where you are."

"But it's not too late, sir: we'll clear a hundred thousand yet," pleaded Jacob in agony.

"Be silent, and hear what I say to you. When I bought this stock, and paid fifteen thousand pounds for it, I made up my mind either to lose all or to win ten times my stake. I made up my mind that my fortune should be either one hundred and fifty thousand sterling, or nothing. Through nine years I have held to my purpose. Until this hour no one has known that I have risked a penny. Men have made fortunes: I have seen it, and held

to my purpose, and held my tongue. Men have gone mad with success or failure; I am the same to-day that I was ten years ago. This morning, stock reached eight hundred and ninety; a thousand fools like you sold, and now it is falling, and will fall yet more. But it is my belief that it will rise again. It will rise to one thousand. When it touches one thousand, I sell; not before, and not afterwards. I shall win one hundred and fifty thousand pounds. With that money I shall found a banking-house. It will be known as the banking-house of Bendibow and Son. If you and your children were men like myself, the house of Bendibow and Son would become one of the great Powers of Europe. Where now we have ten thousand, in a century we should have a million. But you are not such a man as I am. Your children and your great-grandchildren will not be such men as I am. But I have done what I could. I have written down in a book the rules which you are to obey—you, and all your descendants. If you disobey them, my curse will be upon you, and you will fail. I am not young; and no man knows the day when he shall die: therefore I have called you, Jacob, and made this known to you now; because a day or a month hence might be too late. You are not such a man as I am; but any

man can obey; and if you obey the rules that I have written, you will not fail. Let those rules be written upon your heart, and upon the hearts of your children's children, even unto the latest generation. There is no power in this world so great as a great fortune, greatly used; but a fool may lose that power in a day."

Mr. Bendibow had spoken these words standing erect, and with his eyes fixed steadfastly upon his son: and his tone was stern, solemn, and impressive. He now said, in another tone: "Put the papers back in the strong-box, Jacob, and do not speak of them again, either to me or to any other person, until stock is at one thousand. Come to me then, not before: now go."

"But, father, what if stock never reaches one thousand?" suggested Jacob timidly.

"Then I shall have lost fifteen thousand pounds," returned Mr. Bendibow, composedly resuming his seat in his chair.

Jacob said no more, but replaced the papers in the strong-box, handed the key to his father, and left the room, a different man from what he was when he entered it. He could not be an original great man, but he could appreciate and reverence original greatness; and, being instructed, could faithfully carry out the behests of that great-

ness. Doubtless his father, who had the insight into human nature which generally characterises men of his sort, had perceived this, and had shaped his conduct accordingly. Nor is it impossible—the greatest of men being but men, after all—that Mr. Bendibow may have taken his son into his confidence as much to guard against his own human weakness as to provide against the contingency of his death or incapacity. Proudly though he asserted the staunchness of his purpose, he had that day felt the tug of temptation, and may have been unwilling to risk the strain unaided again. Be that as it may, it is certain that the confidence came none too soon. When the evening meal was ready, Mr. Bendibow did not appear: his customary punctuality made the delay seem extraordinary; so, after waiting half-an-hour, Jacob went to summon him. He knocked at the door, but no response came. At last he made bold to open the door; and there sat Abraham Bendibow in his chair, with the key of the strong-box in his hand, looking, in the dusk, very much as he had looked when Jacob left him three hours before. But Abraham Bendibow was dead.

All his affairs were found to be in order; and, among the other contents of the strongbox, was the book of rules of which he had spoken to Jacob

As to the South-Sea stock, it sank and sank, and Jacob's heart sank with it; and when the stock had reached six hundred and forty, Jacob's heart was in his boots. Nevertheless, he was faithful to his trust, and held on. Soon afterwards the agents of the Company bought largely, and stock rose once more, and practically for the last time. The hour came at last when it was quoted at one thousand, and then, with a trembling delight, and with a conviction of his father's prescience and wisdom that amounted to religious veneration, Jacob went forth and sold; and that night he deposited in the strong-box bank-notes and bullion to the amount of one hundred and fifty thousand pounds. Such was the beginning of the famous house of Bendibow.

CHAPTER VII.

THE history of the house of Bendibow and Son—or of Bendibow Brothers, as it came to be called—was broadly the history of the eighteenth century in England. Persons who deal in money are apt to come into relations with most of the prominent characters and events of their time, and Bendibow Brothers dealt in that commodity very extensively.

The thirty years covered by the reign of George the Second was a picturesque and brilliant period. Famous personages were to be met everywhere—in London, Epsom, Bath, Tunbridge, and Scarborough: York, too, was a fashionable place in those days; Shrewsbury was full of merry-making, and Newmarket attracted other people besides professed lovers of the turf. Congreve was living out the last years of his life, and Mrs. Bracegirdle was still acting his plays, when the second representative of the Brunswick line came to the throne. Addison had died a few years previously, Steele a year or two afterwards; Pope, Swift, Fielding, and Defoe were all in full cry and condition. Lord Bathurst was in mid-career as patron of literary celebrities, and the fascinating and romantic Earl of Peterborough was losing his heart to the sweet voice and face of Anastasia Robinson. Hogarth and Kneller were in existence, and Arbuthnot was witty and wise. Handsome Tom Grantley, destined to become one of the foremost men of fashion and intrigue of his time, was in 1732 a little squalling baby in the south of Ireland. George the First had created the earldom of Seabridge upwards of fifteen years before, in consequence of assistance rendered to him by the then head of the family during the

Rebellion; and it was at about the same date that Mary Lancaster, niece of Lord Croftus, first saw the light—she who was afterwards to unite the two families by her marriage with the second Earl of Seabridge. Meanwhile, Mary Bellenden was esteemed the loveliest, and Mary Wortley Montague the cleverest, of living women. As time went on, and the century approached its middle age, Garrick began to act in London; Beau Nash, superb, autocratic, and imperturbable, ruled the roast at Bath; Horace Walpole embroidered society with the brilliance of his affected and sentimental persiflage; Smollett hobnobbed with Quin, and the Great Commoner stalked about, glaring out appallingly from the jungle of his shaggy wig. Amusement was the religion of the age, and recklessness was its morality. It was the apotheosis of card-playing; literature was not good form; cards and men formed the library of the Duchess of Marlborough. What are now termed the mental resources of civilisation being as yet unknown, life was so conducted as to become a constant variety and succession of condiments. Criminals were made to minister to the general entertainment by being drawn and quartered, as well as beheaded and hanged; gentlemen pistolled and skewered one another

instead of being contented with calling each other names, and suing for damages and defamation. Tempers were hot, hearts were bold, and conversation was loose on all sides. Wine was cheap, tea was dear, gluttony and drunkenness were anything but improper. The country-folk were no less energetic on their own scale. They romped and shouted at village fairs and wakes; they belaboured one another scientifically with cudgels; half-naked women ran races and jumped hurdles, May-poles were hoisted on every green; and the disaffected rode out on the king's highway with masks and pistols. Love-making, with persons of condition at least, was a matter less of hearts than of postures and phrases: it was etiquette for everybody in small clothes to languish at the feet of everybody in petticoats. The externals of life were sumptuous and splendid, because no time and trouble were wasted upon internals. An element of savagery and brutality pervaded all classes, high and low, without which the game could not have been kept up with such unflagging plausibility and zeal.

But all this fun had to be fed with money, or at all events with credit; and Bendibow Brothers were always prepared, on proper security, to furnish either: wherefore a great portion of this

gorgeous procession passed through their dingy office in the city, on its way to or from its debaucheries. And since the brethren (following the injunctions of their long-headed founder) aimed no less at social distinction than at the wealth which should render that distinction profitable, they frequently saw their way to accept, from certain of their customers, interest payable otherwise than in hard cash. An introduction to Lord Croftus's drawing-room, for example, might be cheaply purchased for an advance of a thousand pounds; a sinecure post in the army for a junior member of the firm, or a foreign order for the senior, would be worth three or four times as much; while, for the hand of a daughter of the junior branch of a titled family, twenty or thirty thousand pounds down would be considered a profitable transaction. Worldly wisdom and foresight, in short, formed as important a part of the Bendibow policy as direct and literal pecuniary returns. Indeed, it was upon the profit of their innumerable small transactions that they relied for the bulk of their material wealth: with the great and haughty their dealings were uniformly liberal and dignified. The consequence was, that when the Jacobite rebellion broke out, the Government accepted a substantial loan from Bendibow Brothers,

as being not only the richest but the most loyal and respectable firm of bankers in England. Mr. Joseph Bendibow, one of the partners, was, for some unexplained reason, "promoted" to the rank of colonel in the regular army; and five years later the head of the family was raised to the baronetage. Hereupon a constituency was purchased at a not too exorbitant rate, and—the Bendibows having long since abandoned their Jewish proclivities, and presented themselves to the world as immaculate Protestant Christians—for the remainder of their career the descendants of the obscure Hebrew goldsmith and moneylender were numbered among the lawgivers of their country and trusty advisers of the Crown.

It was an honourable position, patiently tried for and cleverly won. None of the Bendibows, since the time of Abraham their progenitor, had been in any sense men of genius; but, on the other hand, none of them had been destitute of common-sense, prudence, steadiness, suppleness, and persistency; and they had also possessed—what perhaps was of more value to them than any of their native virtues—a private family bible in the shape of the book of rules written and bequeathed to them by the patriarch above mentioned. It would be interesting, and possibly

edifying, to review the contents of this work. No doubt it was brimming over with human astuteness; and might be described as a translation into eighteenth-century ideas and language of the mystic injunctions of the old alchemists in reference to the Philosopher's Stone. Be that as it may, the book went far towards achieving the end for which it was composed; and if the Bendibows were as yet not quite a hundred-fold millionaires and peers of the realm, they seemed fairly on their way to be so. To that consummation the brethren themselves looked forward with justifiable confidence. Nevertheless, viewing their whole history from the vantage-ground of our own century, we can see that the accession of George the Third was the period of their actual apogee. It was about that time that Francis Bendibow was born—he whose genius almost equalled that of Abraham, and who, indeed, carried the reputation of the bank to a point higher than any which it had before attained. But reputation does not always, nor in the long run, mean prosperity; and Sir Francis Bendibow, along with his genius, perhaps possessed some qualities which, under pressure of circumstances, were capable of doing mischief. But that shall be enlarged upon in its proper place.

Society was now becoming more intellectual, more civilised, and more depraved. That abstruse idea which is covered by the phrase "Fine Gentleman" now received its most complete embodiment. It was a patrician era, but also an era in which genius, of whatever kind, could force men and women from obscurity to the light. The youthful Sheridan was making a good impression at Bath by his fine figure, hearty face, and manly and unaffected bearing, even before the "Rivals" and the "School for Scandal" had been written; and he and his fellow-countryman, Tom Grantley—though the latter was more than fifteen years his senior—were on the most cordial terms; and it was said at the time that Grantley was of assistance to Sheridan in that gentleman's elopement with the beautiful Miss Linley. Fox, and others of his kidney, were setting the fashion of colossal gambling as a means of working-off their superfluous nervous vitality and the estates of their ancestors; Wattie's and White's, Brookes's and Raggett's saw such sights as will never come again; statesmen and macaronis, parsons and opera dancers, soldiers and play-writers, fine ladies and fine females, all according to their several natures and capacities, took the most serious interest in cock-fighting, rat-hunting, singing and dancing, betting, dicing, an-

tique statues and old pictures, divorce and atheism. But, as the century culminated, war, and the armies which fought it, overtopped all other interests; political opinions, or professions of opinion, were at the acme of vehemence; furious pamphlets fluttered on all sides; Dibdin wrote songs to encourage Nelson's sailors; Wilkes was synonymous with liberty; and King George, believing himself the father of his people, spent his long life in doing them all the harm in his power. And all this, too, required money, and more money than ever; and Bendibow Brothers were more than ever mixed up in it—more, indeed, than was at that time suspected—for Francis Bendibow had begun to show what was in him; and his suggestions and enterprises had begun first to astound, then to dazzle and fascinate, his more methodical and humdrum partners, until it seemed likely that he might take upon himself to edit a new and improved edition of the private family bible. In truth, he was a very brilliant and popular gentleman, whom everybody knew, and whom nobody who was anybody disliked. He was the confidant of as many social secrets as a fashionable physician or lawyer, and knew more about political intrigues than any other man out of the Cabinet. It was a marvel how well, considering the weight of his

multifarious responsibilities, he managed to preserve his aspect of gaiety and good-nature. But it often happens, that precisely those persons who have most to conceal, and who deal most in mysteries, appear, in the careless eyes of their contemporaries, more frank and undisguised than anybody else. Sir Francis Bendibow, be it repeated, was a general favourite of society, as well as a special favourite of fortune; and somewhere about 1790 he confirmed his successes by allying himself with the Barons Croftus by marriage with a daughter of the then Lord.

From that time forward, the affairs of Bendibow Brothers went on with much ostensible smoothness and good-fortune; though whether anything less serene and comfortable lay hidden beneath this fair surface is a question, the answer to which must for the moment be reserved. One or two events only need to be mentioned, in order to bring us back to the epoch at which the story properly begins. Tom Grantley, who throughout his career had always been an ample customer of the Bendibows, and who, like so many others, had insensibly allowed his business relations with them to develop into social intercourse, had, in 1771, placed his son Charles, then a boy of fifteen, in the bank in the capacity of clerk, with the

understanding that he was afterwards to be admitted to partnership, should he turn out to be qualified for that position. This was a good thing for Charles, in a pecuniary point of view; and his abilities, which were always remarkable, made it likely that his career would be a successful one. As for the social aspects of the affair, the Bendibows were perhaps greater gainers than Grantley, since Charles had the noble Seabridge blood in his veins. But Charles's father, though aristocratic and imperious enough in his own person, was theoretically liberal and even republican in his views; and possibly he was not sorry to requite the neglect which his wife's family had shown him by embarking the grandson of the earl in a mercantile life. Charles, for his own part, was, actually, what his father was only in idea; that is to say, he sympathised with the enlightened and revolutionary spirit that was abroad, and which was taking palpable form in the American colonies and in France. He rebelled against the claims of caste, and, before he was twenty-one, was pretty well known as a social reformer and radical. This, of itself, would not have impaired the social popularity of one who could call an earl his kinsman; not only because extreme opinions were in those days considered rather interesting and amusing

than otherwise, but because then, as at all times, a man may be or say anything he pleases, provided he will be or say it in a sufficiently graceful or skilful manner. But Charles, unfortunately, was as abrupt, unconciliating, and dogmatic in his manner as he was startling and unconventional in his views. He was not only able to utter disagreeable and embarrassing truths at inconvenient moments, but he seemed actually fond of doing so; and, since he was not more prepossessing in person than adroit in behaviour, society for the most part ended by giving him up as a bad job. "Charles would be very well, if he wasn't so damned sincere," was one of the least uncharitable judgments that those who were willing to be his friends pronounced upon him. Charles meanwhile seemed to take the situation very composedly. The social intercourse which was not to be had in fashionable drawing-rooms and coffee-houses, he sought and found elsewhere—among literary men, perhaps, or others still lower in the social scale. In his chosen circle, whatever it was—he was eminent and influential. Everyone respected him; many feared him a little; a few liked him heartily, or even loved him. He was of a fiery, warlike temperament, and nothing could daunt him or dishearten him. He was proud and sensitive

beyond what seemed seasonable; but those who knew him well said he was full of tenderness and generosity, and that a more affectionate and self-sacrificing man never lived. Perhaps neither his friends nor his foes entirely understood him. One thing about him at all events, no one understood —and that was, how he and Francis Bendibow came to be such friends. The two young men were, it is true, nearly of the same age; their business interests were identical; and much of their time must of necessity be passed in each other's neighbourhood. But no amount of external association together will of itself suffice to make true friends: it is quite as apt to have an opposite effect. It was plain to the most careless glance that Charles and Francis were in disposition and temperament as wide asunder as the poles; and—the affairs of the bank aside—Francis was devoted to all those objects and interests for which Charles cared nothing, or less. Nevertheless, there was the fact, account for it how you will. Charles was devoted to Francis; resented any disparagement of him; and did, upon occasion, even go so far as to espouse the side of his friend in argument against the side of which he himself was the representative—for Francis's logic was sometimes faulty, and his faculty of seeing all the best points

in his own cause was not always infallible. Whether Francis's friendship for Charles was quite so ardent and thorough as Charles's for him may be doubted. Men who are universally friendly and popular seldom rise to the height of a vehement individual preference. But there is little doubt that he was impressed by Charles's affection, that he reciprocated it as far as in him lay, and that, although he was wont to affect a good-humoured air of patronising his friend, chaffing him, and laughing at the intensity and seriousness of his convictions, he in reality deferred to Charles's judgment and recognised his personal force and capacity. "We could never get on without old Charles," was a saying often in his mouth. And when Charles fell in love with Francis's sister, Ruth Bendibow, Francis was a hearty supporter of the match. The marriage took place when Charles was in his thirty-first year—Tom Grantley having died upwards of ten years before. The following year a daughter was born, and her name was called Perdita.

When Perdita was about six years old, a mysterious calamity occurred. Society wondered, guessed, and speculated, but never found out the whole truth of the affair. All that was certain was, that Charles Grantley suddenly disappeared

from London, leaving his wife and his daughter behind him. There was a rumour that he had also left behind him a letter, addressed to Sir Francis Bendibow, begging him to look after the welfare of his family, whom he could not ask to share with him his exile and disgrace. What, then, was this disgrace? Sir Francis, when interrogated on the subject, preserved a melancholy and dignified silence. It was surmised that he would not accuse his friend, and that he could not defend him. But had Charles Grantley, whom all the world had taken to be at least the soul of honesty and honour—could he have been guilty of a dishonest or dishonourable action? Well, human nature is weak, and the best and strongest of men have their unaccountable moments of frailty. Grantley, no doubt, had been exposed to temptation. He had for some time past been admitted a full partner in the firm; and it was known that he had latterly been building and furnishing an expensive house. Moreover, he was believed to be a member of more than one secret society; and he had perhaps been induced or compelled to advance large contributions towards their support. The coffers of the bank were open to him. . . . Why rehearse again a story so often told? Enough that Charles Grantley vanished from the

world that knew him, and that no news ever came to tell whither he had gone. It was only charitable to suppose that he did not long survive the disgrace into which he had plunged himself.

His wife died some years after his disappearance; not of a broken heart—for she had never cherished any very vital affection for her husband, and always seemed angry rather than grieved at the calamity—but from an acute attack of bilious fever. She was a beautiful and talented woman, but probably was not without certain blemishes of head or heart. Perdita was thus left—so far as could be known—an orphan. Sir Francis Bendibow, amidst general applause, formally adopted her. Certainly, to accept as your own the daughter of the man who has defrauded you, especially when that man happens to be your brother-in-law, shows a rare magnanimity. Perdita was brought up as befitted a young lady liable to hold a good position in society. For obvious reasons she was allowed to forget her unhappy father, and encouraged to regard herself as the actual offspring of her benovelent guardian. The girl throve passing well, more than fulfilling her early promise of beauty and grace. She, moreover, gave signs of possessing a strongly-marked character, hard, subtle, and persistent; but, as the crudity of girlhood

passed away, those harsher lineaments ceased to obtrude themselves—the young lady's own sense of harmony doubtless prompting her to disguise them beneath a soft and seductive exterior: and she was by nature luxurious, and had the instinct of equipping herself cap-à-pie from the mystic arsenal of voluptuous artifice to which only such women have the key. Her début in society was very effective; and she took all the other women's admirers away from them. But her own heart seemed to remain unimpaired: and, on the other hand, there was a lack of really desirable offers of marriage; for it was thought, not unreasonably, that Perdita ought to make a great match—say an earl at the least. But the earls hung back: perhaps it was the still lingering shadow of her unfortunate parent that disqualified her. Here, however, fortune—who, save for that one ill-turn, was in love with Perdita almost to the end of her career—brought into the field an elderly and extremely wealthy foreign personage, who succumbed to the young lady's fascinations at their first interview, made her an offer of his cordial and worldly effects on the following week, and was made the happiest of men in making her his wife by the end of the month. Perdita, for some unexplained reason, received little more than a

bare outfit from her affectionate uncle and foster-father; but there were unexceptionable settlements on the part of her husband; and she accompanied the latter to the Continent with éclat and with a brilliant future before her—being still in her nineteenth year, while her husband was at least sixty, with an impaired constitution. Whether the issue of the affair was as prosperous as it bade fair to be, Sir Francis Bendibow was not informed, for his adopted daughter had never since her departure troubled him with any letters or messages. For all he knew she might be in the New World, or even in the next. The worthy baronet consoled himself for this neglect as best he might by lavishing attention upon the rearing and education of his *bonâ-fide* child, a sickly and rather unpromising son. The result of the education was, that the young gentleman was allowed pretty much his own way; and, like other men before him who have steered in the same direction, he arrived at nothing particularly edifying. Sir Francis spoilt him, in short; and the youth was not one of those who can stand much spoiling. He could fight a cock, throw a main, hunt a rat, drive a horse, and upon occasion—as we have seen—could upset a coach. Perhaps, when the time came, he would be able to carry on the business of the great

house of Bendibow Brothers; but it must be confessed that at present probabilities looked the other way. It was not merely that young Mr. Thomas Bendibow had no practical knowledge of business; but that he had no brothers, nor even any cousins; that he was, in fact, the last of his family; and looked, at twenty, as if he hardly had pith in him to outlive his father, who was sixty-two; so that good Sir Francis sitting day after day in his little private room at the rear of the banking premises, may be supposed to have found some elements of concern and anxiety mingling with the general complacency of his reflections. Surely he did not deserve to be the prey of such solici-tude. He had long since forgotten the follies and vanities of his golden youth, and had settled down to be one of the handsomest, kindliest, courtliest, most immaculate elderly baronets imaginable.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE first week of May had passed by, and Sir Francis Bendibow was sitting in his private room at the bank, with one elegant leg crossed over the other, and his hands folded over his embroidered waistcoat. He appeared to be meditating, with

the placid gravity that characterised him, over the results of a well-spent and profitable life. At length, with a gentle sigh, he uncrossed his legs, took his watch from his fob, and consulted its enamelled face. It wanted five minutes to three. Sir Francis might, with propriety, abandon business for the day, and betake himself to his residence in Great George Street. He was just on the point of touching a bell, and ordering his carriage to be called, when the servant came to the door and said that someone was without who desired to see Sir Francis.

"Someone!" said Sir Francis, mildly and interrogatively,

"A lady, Sir Francis," explained the servant: and something in the way he pronounced the word induced the baronet to imagine that the lady was neither old nor ugly.

"What is the lady's name?" he inquired, sitting more erect in his chair and settling his stock.

"She gave no name, Sir Francis: she said Sir Francis would receive her."

"Hum! I was about to ask you to order the carriage, Catnip; you may order the carriage to be ready in ten minutes; meanwhile, you may admit the lady—ahem!"

"Yes, Sir Francis."

A minute afterwards the lady was admitted.

Sir Francis's intuition had not been at fault. The lady was young and lovely. She was five feet five inches in height—as the baronet judged, and he was an adept in women—perfectly and rather fully formed. with a foot and ankle worthy of Titania. Her right hand was ungloved, showing a small soft wrist, taper fingers with dimpled knuckles, and a long thumb. Her movement and bearing were those of a finished woman of the world, supplemented by just physical proportions and native grace. She was dressed richly, and in the fashion; yet with such subtle art, that one remarked that her attire suited her before remarking what it was. When she came in her face was veiled; but the silken web was not so dense as to conceal the sparkle of a pair of dark eyes; while over her small ears and at the back of her neck were discernible some short locks of bright curling hair.

She advanced into the middle of the room, and there paused, while Sir Francis presented her with a grand obeisance.

"Your humble servant, madam," said he. "May I entreat you to be seated?"

"Thank you, sir," she answered, placing herself in the chair he handed to her. "I shall not detain you very long. I came to you on a matter of business."

She betrayed a slight foreign accent in speaking; but there was something in the tone of her voice that attracted the baronet's attention. It was a full, clear, and yet lightsome voice, varying easily through changing intonations, always harmonious and perfectly under control: it evinced self-possession and a musical ear. Sir Francis was already charmed, and summoned all his graces to confront the occasion. It was not every day that destiny brought to him such customers as this.

"I shall esteem myself fortunate in being able to be of any service to you," he said, with a manner at once impressive and deferential.

"You are extremely good, sir."

"I protest, madam—not in the least. May I inquire, madam, whether you are familiar with London?"

"I was in London a number of years ago, sir—I think it must now be ten years——"

"In that case, madam, you must have been very young—quite a child, in fact. The town may therefore have some novelty for you. Fortunately, the season is just commencing, and——"

"Alas, sir, I am not in a position to avail myself of gaieties."

"Indeed? Egad, madam, I protest you distress me."

"It is because I have recently met with a sad misfortune."

"You are too young, and—if I might be permitted to say it—too fair to be the prey of misfortune, madam. The misfortune is not, I trust, irremediable?"

"I fear it is, sir. I speak of the loss of my husband."

Sir Francis was a little puzzled. Was this lady more or less of a woman of the world than he had imagined? Was there not, after all, something of the *ingénue* about her? To be sure, a widow cannot, as a general thing, be accurately described as an *ingénue*: but, practically, this widow might be so. For all her polished self-possession of voice and bearing—which might as well be the result of early education as of the training of worldly experience—for all this, her mind and heart might be fresh and unsophisticated. There was a flavour of artlessness, almost of innocent appeal, in what she said. The baronet felt his benevolent heart expand. The prospect of relations—business relations, of course—with a young lady at once

so attractive and so unprotected, enchanted him. But it was necessary to be sure of his ground—to inquire further.

"Widowhood for the young and beautiful is indeed the most pathetic of all predicaments!" he exclaimed with feeling. "I should judge, madam, that you can't have enjoyed the married state long?"

"Not very long; though it seems long in one way."

"Ay; and all too short in another, no doubt. Ah, my dear madam, I can sympathise with you; I have had my bereavements, egad! and my sorrows. These are terrible times, madam; though, thank God, that Corsican monster is safe at last: but he has made many widows, in this country and elsewhere. Your husband, perhaps, fell upon the field of battle?"

"No, sir. Perhaps I should have told you that my husband was a Frenchman."

This reply embarrassed Sir Francis. It was his intention to be agreeable to the lady, and he had unwittingly disturbed her sensibilities. But a few moments sufficed him to recover his self-possession. Not for a trifle of consistency would he forfeit the good opinion of so charming a client.

"The French," he said, "are a brave and noble people. Now that there is no longer war between us and them we can acknowledge it. Bonaparte, after all, was a great general, and a man of genius. No one can regret more than myself, madam, the necessity which has removed him to St. Helena."

"Is that your opinion, sir?" returned the lady coldly. "My husband was a monarchist. To him Bonaparte was a usurper and a tyrant."

Sir Francis struggled not to appear put out of countenance. "Damn these French!" he said internally; "you never know where you are with 'em." Aloud he said: "Your husband was right, madam, from his point of view. He was loyal to his convictions and to his traditions. Everyone must respect them and him—no one, certainly, more than I myself, who am the loyal supporter of my own king. That such a man as your husband should be cut off in the prime of his youth is a calamity to his country," concluded Sir Francis, feeling that at all events he was safe there.

"I beg your pardon, sir?" said the lady ingenuously.

"Your husband, I say, dying in the first flush of youth——"

"Oh, my husband was not a very young man," interposed the lady gravely. "In fact, it may be said that he died of old age. He was only a little over seventy, it is true; but he had for several years past been in very infirm health."

"Zounds, madam, you—you surprise me!" exclaimed Sir Francis, almost losing patience. Reflecting, however, that it was unlikely a wife so youthful should have felt any passionate attachment to a husband so ancient, he plucked up courage: the task of consoling the lady would be by so much the less difficult. She sat there very quietly, with her hands resting one within another in her lap, and her dark eyes sparkling through her veil. Sir Francis conceived a strong desire to see that veil lifted. But he would proceed cautiously.

"You are, then, alone in the world?" he remarked compassionately. "Probably, however, you may have kinsfolk in England or France who——"

"Indeed, sir, I am very unhappy," said the lady, with a melancholy simplicity. "Such few relatives as I possess are not, I fear, kindly disposed towards me."

"Surely they must be very unnatural persons —ahem!" cried Sir Francis indignantly. "But let

me entreat you not to be downcast, my dear madam. Providence sometimes raises up friends to us when we least expect it. If I might speak of myself——"

"Indeed, you are very good," said the lady softly, and with a little movement of one of her hands that seemed to indicate confidence and gratitude. Sir Francis moved his chair a little nearer. The lady continued: "My husband, you must know, has left me the entire control of his property, which I believe is very large. I think his income was what you would call, in your money, ten thousand pounds—is it not?—every year: but I may be mistaken: I am so stupid in those affairs: at least, it was more than three hundred thousand francs."

"In that case, madam, you would be rather under than over the truth in your estimate," said the baronet, bowing with increased tenderness of manner, and bringing his chair so close to that of his visitor that she drew back a little, with a movement half-startled, half-coquettish. "We must speak low," the baronet hastened to say; "this room is not quite so secluded as I could wish, and curious ears. . . . but to the point. This property——"

"I feel so helpless," said the lady, leaning forward with an impulse of confidence. "I do not care for money: I do not understand its value, nor how to manage it. I am overwhelmed with this responsibility, which I would gladly have escaped. But my husband's will was very stringent and precise in its terms, and I have no choice but to accept the burden he has laid upon me."

"Very right, my dear madam: your sentiments do you every honour. 'Tis a responsibility, indeed—but one which, with good advice, you can easily support. I may say, without vanity, that my experience in matters of finance is as extensive——"

"Oh, sir, I am already convinced of it," interposed the lady cordially. "Your reputation is as high on the Continent as here. A friend of my husband's—known, I believe, also to you—counselled me to come to you and to put myself unreservedly in your hands. The name of the gentleman was Mr. Lancaster—Mr. Philip Lancaster, I think."

"Lancaster! yes, yes," said Sir Francis genially. "I have seen Philip—a fine young fellow, though with a turn for poetry: but he is still young. The Lancasters, madam, as I doubt not you are aware, are kin to the Barons Croftus: it

is the family name. They are relatives of my own through my late wife, who was a Lancaster. Philip is my nephew by marriage, though not by blood. In sending you to me he has placed me under a very heavy obligation—ahem!"

"You cannot expect me to believe, sir, that the management of a property like that of my late husband can be much of an object to one who is accustomed to lend money to empires."

"My dear madam, you misapprehend me. The obligation has reference to yourself, not to your property. As to that, I trust you will not think so ill of me as to imagine that I would seek my own profit in any transactions I might be fortunate enough to carry out for you."

"What you say, sir, persuades me that the English are the most genteel people in the world. And besides," added the lady, looking down and turning the pearl-and-diamond ring upon the finger of her ungloved hand, "it relieves me from an embarrassment." Here she looked up again, and Sir Francis felt the dark eyes meeting his own. He was by this time in a mood to exchange a deal that financiers hold dear for something not more substantial than a draft upon the bank of sentiment. He had been open to romantic impressions in his youth, and his old age was not

entirely emancipated from occasional bondage of that sort. But never, he thought, in all his experience, had he encountered aught so bewitching in the shape of woman as she who now sat before him. There could be no doubt that she was already extremely well-disposed towards him; and his redoubtable heart, which had seen him through many a tough encounter of more kinds than one, actually beat with anticipation as he pictured to himself the felicity that might be in store for him.

"Never!" he exclaimed fervently, laying his hand upon his heart, and allowing the ardour of his feelings to glow through the handsome dignity of his countenance,—"never, madam, need you be a prey to any embarrassment from which the utmost of my humble endeavours may suffice to free you."

"I am convinced of your kindness and goodness; but, dear sir, I am aware that matters of business cannot be controlled by the dictates of generous feeling. For my own part, I should never have dreamed of making any stipulations; but, as I observed just now, the directions in my late husband's will are painfully stringent. I must confess to you that it was not altogether in

accordance with his wishes that I should reside in England after his death."

There was a slight tremor in the tone in which she made this confession. Sir Francis leaned forward, devoured with tender curiosity.

"In fact, sir, he was opposed to it. But it had always been my dream to revisit my native land; for I am an Englishwoman by birth, though so long an exile. I therefore resolved, if it were possible, to overcome the obstacles which he had placed in my way. It rests with you, dear sir, to decide whether or not I am to succeed."

"With me! my dear—my very dear madam," cried the baronet, impulsively extending his hands and imprisoning one of hers between them. "Do I hear you say that it is my happy privilege to be so far the arbiter of your destiny? Oh, charming woman! command me! enlighten me! show me how I can prevent you from ever putting a greater distance between us than—ahem—than——"

"You must not speak like this," gently interposed the lady, as the baronet hesitated for a phrase. She withdrew her hand from his own, yet so that the deprivation seemed to convey more of regard than would the caress of another woman. "You make me regret my coming to

you on this errand: it would be better, I think, if you could direct me to some other banker——"

"Some other! Impossible! How have I been so unhappy as to make you regret this interview?"

"It could be for only one reason," said the lady, still more kindly. "You lead me to esteem so highly the value of your friendship, that I cannot but regret it should be mingled with interests of a less elevated character. I could prize you so much as a friend that I am reluctant to think of myself as your customer."

Sir Francis positively blushed, and it was some moments before he recovered himself. "Do not think of yourself as my customer!" he then exclaimed, yielding himself completely to the fascinations of this veiled enchantress; "think of me as yours—as the customer who applies to you for all that renders his existence a blessing to him—for your friendship, your favour, your . . . ."

"Oh sir!" murmured the lady, rising in confusion.

"Charming creature!" supplicated the baronet; "be to me what you will, but do not rob me of the gift of your presence! Do not mistrust me—I am all gentleness and veneration. I am

impulsive; but a look, a word, restrains me. Come, we will speak of business: business shall be the lowly yet honourable route by which we may in due course travel to better things. But, business first! How can I be of service to you? Is it your desire to make any deposit? Is there any negotiation . . . .; but pray, honour me by resuming your seat."

"I blame myself for detaining you so long; but I will try to be brief. It amounts to a question of the rate of interest. I am so little acquainted with money-matters, sir, as to be ignorant of the current rate in England."

"Your ignorance does you no discredit, madam. The fluctuations in the money-market have of late years been great; at present, happily, confidence is being restored, and interest is lower. Six per cent, would I think represent a liberal——"

"Six per cent.? Ah, I understand now the full potency of the conditions my late husband imposed upon me. It would be useless for me to attempt to contend against them. I must return, then, to France." In saying this the lady repressed a sigh, and made a movement as if to close the interview.

"But, for pity's sake, explain yourself, dear madam!" cried Sir Francis.

"It would humiliate me to reveal to you the severity—I must not call it the unkindness—of which my husband. . . . No, indeed, sir, you must excuse me——"

Sir Francis interrupted her by an eloquent gesture, as much as to say, "At least, trust me!"

"If I must speak, then, let it be as to a friend, and in the confidence of friendship," said the lady, uttering herself with an apparent effort. "My husband's instruction was, that in case of my living in England, the property was to be entrusted to an English bank of unquestionable solvency, at an interest of twenty per cent. If this rate were not allowed by the bank, the property was not to be deposited in England: and should I still persist in residing here, the whole of it was to go to a blood-relative of my husband. I have to choose, therefore, between being a beggar and remaining an exile. Were I a man, I should not hesitate to select the former alternative, trusting to myself to earn an honest livelihood: but, as I am a woman . . . .;" her voice faltered, and she paused.

"As you are a woman, and the most adorable of women," said Sir Francis gravely, "it shall be my happy privilege to defeat your husband's unjust purpose, and to bid you remain where

your own inclination and the urgency of your friends would place you. Consider the matter settled. Nay—do not reply. I claim—I may even affirm that I possess—the right to impose my wishes upon you in this respect. I am the head of the house of Bendibow; and permit me to add, dear madam, that in the course of a long experience I have never been engaged in any transaction which promised me advantages so great as the present." Sir Francis concluded this speech with a bow that was in keeping with the dignity and magnificence of his sentiments. In fact, he could not but be conscious of the grandeur of his act, and his manner uplifted itself accordingly. But the lady shook her head.

"Were the soundness of your reasoning as unmistakable as the goodness and nobility of your heart," she said, "I should have no ground for hesitation; but you offer me what it is impossible I should accept. How can I consent to receive a yearly sum from you equal to the amount of my present income? It would be indistinguishable from a gift. I thank you from the bottom of my soul: but it cannot be."

"Madam, you wound the heart that you pretend to honour. But that is not all: you infinitely exaggerate your profit in the transaction.

Although twenty per cent. is considerably in excess of the average rates of interest, it would be easy for me so to arrange matters that the bank's loss would be practically nil."

"Ah, if I could believe that . . . ." murmured the lady, half to herself.

"You may believe it implicitly," said Sir Francis, who had taken a sheet of paper and was writing rapidly upon it. In a few moments he finished the writing with a flourish, and handed it over to his visitor. It was an agreement, signed and dated, to pay interest at the rate of twenty per cent. upon all moneys which she might deposit in the bank. "My only regret is, that the obligation on your side is so trifling as to be merely nominal: I might otherwise have ventured to hope for some return——"

"You do me injustice, sir," interrupted the lady warmly, "if you imagine that I would yield to your pecuniary liberality what I would refuse to—to other considerations. You do yourself injustice if you regard your personal worth as not outweighing in my eyes all the bullion in your bank. You must indeed, have misunderstood me to think otherwise."

She had risen as she spoke, and so also had Sir Francis. He saw the error he had committed,

and recognised the necessity of correcting it on the instant. He went down upon one knee before her, as majestically as the lack of suppleness which sixty years had inflicted upon his joints permitted.

"I shall remain here, madam," he declared, "until you have consented to condone a fault for which the imperfection of my language, and not the intention of my heart, is to blame. Lovely —irresistible woman, why should I longer attempt to disguise my feelings towards you? Why should I speak of the respect in which I hold you, the honour, the admiration, when there is one word which comprises and magnifies them all? You know that word; yet, for the easing of my own heart, it shall be uttered. I love you!"

"Love . . . .? Oh, sir—you mistake—that is not right—it cannot——"

But Sir Francis had possessed himself of her hand, and was imprinting ardent kisses upon it. The lady trembled; she seemed to be agitated by some strong emotion; with her free hand she pressed her veil over her face. Sir Francis rose and attempted to enfold her in his embrace. But she eluded him, and spoke breathlessly.

"If you really have any regard for me, sir, you will restrain yourself. Let us—ah—let us

speak of other things—this paper. Nay, I entreat you . . . . What would you have me say? Is this a time or a place for me to confess that you have inspired me with a sentiment—oh! have pity, sir. Come to me to-morrow—this evening, if you will—but not here, not now. . . ."

"You give me hope, then? Divine creature do you grant me an interview——?"

"Yes, yes—anything! indeed, you may command me but too easily: only, if you love me at all, have consideration for my position—for——"

"Enough! I am obedient, and I am mute, save as you bid me speak," cried the baronet, almost bewildered with the immensity of his own good fortune, and physically much out of breath besides. He sank into his chair, panting. "We understand each other!" he sighed out, with an impassioned smile. "Till this evening! meanwhile——"

"This paper, then? Is it a legal form? Are you serious in making such a contract with me?"

The baronet nodded profoundly. "It bears my signature: it is complete and irrevocable!"

"But my own name is not written here. You have left a blank."

"For you to fill up, dearest creature! How could I write your name, when you have not told me what it is?"

"How, sir? You do not know my name?" exclaimed the lady, with an accent of surprise.

"Positively, I have not a notion of it. The servant did not announce it."

"And you enter into this contract with one of whom you know nothing?"

"'Tis yourself, fairest of your sex, not your name, that has importance for me," panted the baronet complacently. "But you will tell it me? and lift that veil that obscures so much beauty?"

"Apparently, Sir Francis, it has obscured more than my beauty," returned the lady drily. She approached the table at which he sat, and added, "Give me your pen."

Somewhat startled at the abruptness of her tone, the baronet complied with her request. She held the paper upon the desk with her left hand, while she wrote a name in the blank space which Sir Francis hed left for that purpose. His eye followed the swift movement of the pen, and when the writer laid it down, he read out the name mechanically——

"Perdita, Marquise Desmoines."

Sir Francis leant back heavily in his chair, and his arms fell loosely at his side. He stared at the charming figure in front of him with a sort of vacant consternation. She threw back her veil.

The face that was thus revealed was certainly not one to disappoint the most sanguine expectations. In shape it was a full oval, the nose delicate and pointed, with the tip mobile to the changing play of the lips in smiling or speaking. Her chin was firm, her throat solid, round and white. It was the face of one capable alike of luxurious indolence and of dangerous energy; endowed with dimples for mirth and with clear-cut lines for resolute purpose. Sound sense and accurate memory dwelt in the broad brow; good temper in the curve of cheek and eyelid; passion in the full lower lip. From the movements of the features and the poise of the head upon the neck, might be divined that she was proud, generous, or implacable as the whim suited her; but the dominant expression at present was one of archly mischievous amusement.

"You don't seem glad to see me, Uncle Francis!" she exclaimed, making a *moue* of lovely irony.

No answer from the baronet.

"You wanted to kiss me just now; come—I am ready!"

Sir Francis was still speechless.

"Why, uncle, how unsympathetic you are grown all of a sudden! Don't you love your poor widowed niece, whom you haven't seen or heard of for ten years? You were so complimentary and affectionate a moment ago! And so generous, too, uncle," she added, holding up the signed agreement between her white forefinger and thumb. At the sight of this the baronet's countenance became ghastly, and he emitted a groan.

Perdita, Marquise Desmoines, threw back her head and laughed with all her might—a laugh full of liquid music. "You are a most incomprehensible man, uncle," she declared, when she had recovered herself. "When my veil is down you call me fairest of my sex, dearest creature, and sweetest of women; you go down on your knees to me, devour my hand, and pay me ten thousand sterling a year to live in London. You were so delightfully impetuous, in short, that you almost frightened me. Who would have expected such ardour from a man of your age? Then, when the veil is lifted, you sit as silent and impassive as a bag of guineas; you glare at me as if I were a

gorgon. I hope you will be more agreeable when you come to see me this evening? We understand each other, you know—don't we?—eh uncle?" And she laughed once more.

"Well, well, Perdita," said the baronet at last in a feeble voice, "you are a monstrous clever girl, and you may have your laugh out. As for that paper, you may as well return it me at once. You have your jest: that was mine."

"If all your jests are worth ten thousand a year, I should like to engage you as my court-jester, uncle. You will be worth your weight in silver if you make no more than six jests in a twelvemonth."

"Well, well! but give me the paper: seriously, I insist——"

"You insist! Oh, uncle! Because the uncle is a jester, it does not follow that the niece must be a fool. Besides, you have owed me this for ten years."

"Owed it you? What the doose——"

"Ah, uncle, you are growing old—you are losing your memory. Didn't you marry me to my poor marquis without a dowry? and didn't you say you would make it up to me when times improved? Well, in five or six years perhaps I may give you this paper back; but to do so now,

dear uncle, would be discourteous; it would be denying you the privilege of doing an act of justice."

"Upon my life, madam," exclaimed Sir Francis, plucking up some resolution, "you may keep the paper or not as you see fit; but the engagement is not worth the ink it's written with; and that you shall find out!"

The marquise regarded her exasperated relative with a charming gleefulness. "But it is only for twenty per cent, you know, uncle," she said; "and you are able to put out money at double that rate —and more, I dare say."

"Zounds, ma'am, I protest I am ignorant of your meaning!" cried the baronet indignantly.

"I mean Rackett's," was Perdita's reply.

Sir Francis changed colour and countenance at that word, as if it were a spell that threatened his life. "You don't mean . . . . I don't know . . . ." he began.

"Come, uncle, we are people of the world, are we not?" said the marquise, with a rather cynical smile. "We have all made our little mistakes; I don't mean to annihilate you; but I happen to know all about Rackett's, and have a fancy to make you pay my dowry—not that I need the money, but because I dote upon abstract

justice. Let us be good friends. 'Birds in their little nests agree;' and so should uncle and niece. You may come and pay your respects to me to-morrow, if you can control the impatience that was consuming you ten minutes ago! I have several things to talk over with you. I have taken a house in Red Lion Square for the present: London will not hear of me until next winter. I am but just become a disconsolate widow, and mean to behave accordingly."

Sir Francis sighed with the air of a man who resigns himself to the rigour of fate.

"And you are really going to remain in England?" he said.

"As long as it amuses me. Paris is dull without the emperor. Besides—but you shall hear the rest to-morrow." She rose to go.

At this juncture Catnip tapped at the door and put in his head.

"A gentleman to see you, Sir Francis."

"What is his name?"

"Mr. John Grant, Sir Francis."

"Who?"

"Mr. John Grant, Sir Francis."

"I don't know him," said the baronet. "However, let him enter."

The Marquise Desmoines, going out, met Mr. John Grant in the passage, which was narrow. He ceremoniously made room for her to pass; glanced after her for a moment, and then went into the baronet's room.

CHAPTER IX.

We may assume, for the present, that Mr. Grant's object in calling upon Sir Francis Bendibow was to make arrangements whereby the bank might charge itself with the investment and care of his property. Meanwhile we shall have time to review what had been happening during the previous week at Mrs. Lockhart's. Philip Lancaster and Mr. Grant, having passed their first night at the "Plough and Harrow," returned to the widow's with their luggage the next morning. Their reception on this occasion was much more cordial and confident than it had been the day before. The chance which had brought Lancaster into relations with the family of the gallant old soldier, whose body he had rescued from an unmarked grave, gave him a lien upon the interest and gratitude of the two women such as he might not otherwise have acquired at all. The whole

history of his acquaintance with Major Lockhart had to be told many times over to listeners who could never hear it often enough; and the narrator ransacked his memory to reproduce each trifling word and event that had belonged to their intercourse. The hearers, for their part, commented on and discussed the story with a minuteness so loving and unweariable as to move Lancaster to say privately to Mr. Grant, "Damme, sir, if it doesn't make me wish that I had been the Major, and the Major me. I shall never have a widow and daughter to mourn me so!"

"It is one of the ills of this life," Mr. Grant returned, with a smile, "that, while your mourners are your only honest flatterers, their flattery always comes a day too late. If you had been the Major, you would have missed hearing his praises. Being yourself, you miss the praises themselves; but, upon the whole, I think you have the best of it. The love of these good women for their departed father and husband is like yonder ray of sunshine which falls upon his portrait. It falls only there; but see how it brightens and warms the whole room — and your own countenance, I fancy, especially. In some measure, sir, you are heir of that wealth of affection which was the Major's while he lived.

Your news of him has partly made you his substitute, in the eyes of those who loved him. *Non omnis moriatur.*"

"I wish you would take my poem in hand, and put some poetry into it. 'Tis true the wreath of fame, as well as the brand of infamy, is laid only on dead brows. If a man could but return to life long enough to admire his own statue, or read his damnation in the *Quarterly!*"

"The damnation is swifter of foot than he statue, and sometimes overtakes us on this side the grave," said Mr. Grant. "But your aspiration may be realised. I have known the dead to come to life."

"To find, probably, that the reality of dead features is less comely than the remembrance?"

"As for that, the dead man, if he be wise, will so disguise himself as to avoid recognition. He will renew his life only so far as to be a spectator, not a participant. So that, after all, he is not himself again, nor any other man either: and that is the same as to say that he is nobody, which is as much as a dead body has any right to be."

"I'm not sure of that," said Lancaster, folding his arms and leaning back his head. "There is a fellow in Weimar by the name of Goethe—

you may have heard of him—who has written a poem called 'Faust.' Faust comes back to life, or to youth, which amounts to the same thing, and proves to be anything but a mere spectator. He gets caught in a love-scrape; and there is the devil to pay. There is something attractive in this human life, which grapples us whether we will or no, and makes us dance to one tune or another. On second thoughts, I withdraw my aspiration: one life is enough for me, and may be too much. To live again would be to wear the same old cap and bells, only jingling them to another measure. No man with any self-respect or sense of the ridiculous would do it."

"I apprehend you may be familiar with an earlier work of M. Goethe's, which I also have read, called, the 'Sorrows of Werther.' But I question seriously whether mankind are really the poor puppet-show that you speak of. As soon as you begin to help on the others with their parts, both they and you cease to be puppets. For no man can live in himself, but only in his acts; and if his acts are just, so much the more fragrantly will they survive him."

"I believe that theoretically; but practically I am persuaded that to fall passionately in love

is the only way to become alive: and selfishness is the very essence of love."

"Ha!" ejaculated Mr. Grant stroking his chin. "You have been in love, no doubt?"

"I have been like other men, or as much worse than the average as my intellectual capacity may be superior to theirs. But—no; I have never been alive in the sense I speak of."

"Too unselfish, eh?"

"Well—not quite selfish enough, I suppose; or too cautious to venture on a final plunge into the abyss. The puppet business is less arduous, and gives a man a better opinion of himself, by lowering his opinion of his fellow-actors."

"Ha! and it's too late to expect you to lose your caution now, of course?"

"I have experimented too much!" replied Lancaster, getting up and going to the window.

Mr. Grant took a pinch of snuff and said nothing.

Things went on very quietly in the old brick house. Both the older and the younger man were regular in their habits, and gave their hostesses no trouble. In the mornings after breakfast, Lancaster, who was of an athletic complexion, took a walk of an hour or two along the London road, returning towards noon, and shutting himself

up in his room, where he occupied himself in writing. Mr. Grant commonly spent the forenoon indoors, either busying himself about his private affairs, or reading, or chatting intermittently with Mrs. Lockhart or Marion, as they passed in and out of the sitting-room. In the after-noon he sometimes walked out to get the air, and may occasionally have ridden a horse as far as London. But the after-dinner hours were the pleasantest of the day, from a social point of view. Neither Mr. Grant nor Lancaster were heavy drinkers, and seldom sat at table more than a quarter of an hour after the ladies had left it. Then the four remained together in the sitting-room till bed-time; sometimes playing cards, as was the custom of the time; sometimes content to entertain one another with conversation; sometimes having music, when Lancaster would second Marion's soprano with his baritone. Mrs. Lockhart and Mr. Grant had most of the conversation between themselves; Lancaster, save upon the special topic of the Major, seldom doing more than to throw in an occasional remark or comment, generally of a witty or good-humouredly cynical tendency; Marion being the most uniformly silent of the four, though she possessed rare eloquence as a listener. At cards, Mrs. Lockhart and Lancaster were apt to

be partners against Marion and Mr. Grant. The latter would then display a polished and charming gallantry towards his young *vis-à-vis*, of a kind that belonged rather to the best fashion of the last century than to this; and which was all the pleasanter because it was more the reticence of a sincere and kindly disposition than the feigning of a cold and unsympathetic one. Marion reciprocated his advances with a certain arch cordiality which characterised her when her mind was at ease and her surroundings were agreeable; and thus a chivalrous-playful courtship was established between the elderly gentleman and the young gentlewoman, which was a source of mild entertainment to everybody. The widow and Philip Lancaster, for their parts, were unscrupulously romantic and informal in their intercourse; Philip paying rosy compliments to Mrs. Lockhart, with earnest gravity, and she expressing her affectionate admiration of him in a manner worthy of simple-hearted Fanny Pell. In a certain sense, this pairing-off was grounded upon a natural and genuine attraction between the respective partners. For there was a child-like element in Mrs. Lockhart which was absent from her daughter: and Mr. Grant had a boyish straightforwardness which was not apparent in Lancaster; and thus the balance

was better preserved than had the two younger people contended against the two elder. The former were old where the latter were young. In another point of view, the normal sympathy of youth with youth, conditioned upon the lack of actual experience and the anticipation of an indefinite future, was not to be denied; so that what Lancaster said to Mrs. Lockhart may have had an oblique significance for Marion; and Marion's replies to Mr. Grant could be construed as veiled rejoinders to Lancaster. At the same time, it need not be inferred that anything serious was intended on the part of any of the four.

As regards success in card-playing, it commonly fell to Mrs. Lockhart and Lancaster. "And yet I may say, without vanity, that I was accounted a fair hand at it in my earlier days," Mr. Grant once remarked apologetically to his partner.

"Cards are not played where you have been living?" Marion suggested.

"No; at least, I devoted myself to other games, and my Hoyle was forgotten."

"I think cards are less popular in society than they used to be five-and-twenty years ago," remarked Mrs. Lockhart.

"Oh, it is in many ways a different England from that old one," Mr. Grant said, stroking his

chin with his thumb and forefinger. "A great rage for balloons at that time, I recollect. And for boxing—there was the Prince of Wales boxing with Lord Hervey one night after the opera. Duelling, too; why, in 1786 'twas almost a distinction for a man not to have fought a duel; the point of honour was much oftener vindicated than the point of the argument. No wonder; to be drunk at a certain hour of the day was accounted a mark of breeding among gentlemen. Charles Fox was a terrible fellow for drinking and dicing; I used to see him at Wattier's."

"Wattier's? Mr. Tom Grantley used to go there a great deal," said Mrs. Lockhart, blushing a little after she had spoken.

"Ay, so he did; I have seem him, too—a very handsome man. But I was still quite young when he died. You knew him, madam?"

"I believe mamma knew him very well," put in Marion, with a touch of mischief. "He was to have danced at your wedding, was he not, mamma?"

"He was very kind to me when I was very young and foolish," replied her mother, with quiet simplicity. "He was not in England when I married."

"Grantley was a relative of mine—or would have been, if he had lived ten years longer," Lancaster remarked. "My father and he both married daughters of old Seabridge. By-the-by, didn't he have a daughter who disappeared, or something of that sort?"

"It was a son. I believe he was a very promising young gentleman, but he came to a sad end. Probably you may have met him, Mr. Grant?"

"Never, Madam."

"What end was that?" Lancaster demanded.

"He was discovered in some crime about money—embezzlement, I think. He was a junior partner in the bank; Sir Francis Bendibow trusted him entirely. It almost broke his heart when Charles ran away. But Sir Francis behaved very nobly about it."

"Ah! he had been recently ennobled, had he not?" inquired Mr. Grant in a dry tone. But if he intended any innuendo, Mrs. Lockhart did not perceive it. "He made good the loss out of his own private property," she went on; "and he supported Mrs. Grantley as long as she lived. Poor woman, she was his sister, and of course knew nothing about her husband's wickedness."

"'Tis indeed a romantic story," said Mr. Grant thoughtfully. "Sir Francis, I presume, took all means to trace the fugitive?"

"I think he did all that he honestly could to let him escape. They had been such friends, you know. Besides, if the unfortunate young man had any feeling left, he must have been punished enough in losing his honour and his family."

"Ha! no doubt. He has never been heard from since?"

"No; except that Sir Francis gave me to know that he died a few years afterwards."

"I don't believe that Sir Francis Bendibow was so wonderfully generous," exclaimed Marion, who had been manifesting some signs of restiveness. "You always think a person is good if they say they are. I dare say the Bendibows were very grateful to Charles Grantley for marrying into their family; he had earls and barons for his kinsmen, and the Bendibows have always courted the great. As to Sir Francis, 'tis true his manners are very soft and courteous; but my father has told me he was very unsteady in his youth, and I think my father meant more than he said."

"Yes, admitting that, still the defaulter would not be excused," observed Mr. Grant.

"Since he was not brought to his trial, it cannot be said how much or how little he was a criminal," returned Marion, turning her eyes upon the speaker and kindling with her cause. "He was the son of a man who had nothing ignoble in him, whatever else he may have had. You have told me that yourself, mother. And his mother was noble of birth, and, I have heard, noble of nature, too."

"I can confirm you in that," said Lancaster. "My father used to say that if Edith Seabridge had been born a man instead of a woman, she would have made herself the foremost man in England. But it showed no less nobleness in her to give up everything to the love and service of her husband."

"And the son of such a father and mother should not be judged a thief and coward except upon clear evidence," Marion continued, acknowledging Lancaster's support only by a heightened colour. "He died before I was born, I suppose, but I have always thought that perhaps he was not so much to blame—not in any dastardly way, I mean. He was not a rake and a gambler as Sir Francis was; but a man who cared for learning, and for freedom, and the thoughts that make people better. 'Tis not that kind of man that

would steal money for himself; if he committed a crime, I can only think it must have been for the good of someone he loved—not for his own good. You say he and Sir Francis were dear friends; perhaps it was for Sir Francis's own sake that he did it—to help him through some strait. And then it would be no wonder that Sir Francis let him escape so easily!"

"But," said Mr. Grant, who had listened with attention to Marion's advocacy, with a curious smile occasionally glimmering across his face—"but, my dear, that is a doubtful cause that can be maintained only on the discredit of the other side. How could this man have embezzled for the benefit of Sir Francis if, as I am given to understand, he absconded with the proceeds of his robbery?"

"No one knows whether he had the money with him," answered Marion, driven to bay. "All that is known is, that he disappeared, and that Sir Francis said the bank was robbed. You say that Sir Francis replaced the loss from his private purse; but perhaps his purse had first been filled for him by the very man he denounced as a defaulter!"

At this audacious hypothesis Mr. Grant laughed, though with so kindly an expression that

Marion could not feel she was being ridiculed. "You go near to make me wish, my dear," he said, "that I might be unjustly accused, if I might hope to have you for my defender."

"How fortunate, then, was this questionable cousin of mine, to have made good his embezzlement and his escape, and withal to have found such a defender!" said Lancaster. "You see, Miss Lockhart, my cousinhood with him allows me the liberty of believing him guilty if I choose. Whatever your cousin has done, you are liable to do yourself; so I am only whipping myself across my cousin's back."

"If you need whipping at all, why don't you whip yourself directly?" Marion demanded, quick to resent whatever seemed to her patronising or artificial in another's tone.

"Oh, Marion!" exclaimed Mrs. Lockhart, under her breath.

"I only meant," said Lancaster, smiling, "that whenever I hear of a man committing a crime, I have a fellow-feeling for him: I believe there is the making of a capital criminal in me, if I am only given fair opportunities."

It was not the first time Lancaster had spoken in this way, and Marion had not made up

her mind how to understand him. She looked away and made no reply.

After a moment Mr. Grant said, "You spoke of Charles Grantley having left a family behind him; is one to infer from that there were children?"

"There was a daughter, I think," said Mrs. Lockhart, relieved at the change of subject; "didn't you know her, Marion?"

"She was at the same school with me for a little while; but she was much older than I; she was just leaving when I began. She was very pretty and very genteel; much more genteel than I ever thought of being. She never spoke to me but once, and then she told me to go upstairs and fetch her slippers."

"Did you obey?" asked Lancaster.

"No. At first she looked at me very indignantly; but soon she laughed and said, 'You don't mind me, because I am a woman; but the day will come when you will fetch a man's slippers for him, and kiss them after he has put them on.' She was not like any other girl I ever saw; but almost everyone was fond of her; she could do so much—and yet she was always waited on."

"I should like to know know she turned

out. She evidently had character," remarked Lancaster.

"She married very well, I believe," said Mrs. Lockhart.

"Yes; he was three times her age, and very rich, and so fond of her that he didn't care whether her name was Bendibow or Grantley," rejoined Marion, rather harshly. "She was always called Miss Bendibow, by the way, and she may have been Sir Francis's real daughter, for aught I know; she seemed to think so herself, and she certainly didn't know of any other father. I suppose she didn't much care who her father was. At any rate, she became the Marquise Desmoines."

Lancaster moved suddenly in his chair, and seemed about to speak, but checked himself.

Mr. Grant took snuff, and asked, after a pause, "You say he was very fond of her?"

"Yes, I am sure he was," said Mrs. Lockhart; "he often talked to me about her—for he was a friend of ours, and used to visit us often: because my husband saved his life in France, when the Marquis could not have escaped but for his assistance and protection; and after that he lived in London, and was sometimes so poor as to be forced to give lessons in French and in music; for all this time his estates in France were in

jeopardy, and he did not know whether he would ever recover them. But he did, at last; and then he entered society, though he was no longer a young man; and it was then that he met Perdita Bendibow, as she was called. He proposed to her, and she accepted him; she could scarce have helped but like him, I'm sure. After their marriage they went to France, but I have heard nothing of her since."

"There is one thing you have forgotten, mamma," said Marion; "it is another proof how much the Marquis cared for her. Sir Francis gave her no dowry. I suppose he thought it no more than just to save the money out of what her father had cost him."

"It is not charitable to say so, Marion; and I am sure one could not expect that Sir Francis would give her a dowry, when her husband was so wealthy."

"So, the girl never knew her real father? Well, doubtless it was better so; doubtless he would have wished it so himself, if he retained any unselfish and noble feelings—as you, my dear child, have been charitable enough to imagine may have been the case. And perhaps Perdita's lot was the one best suited to her—she being as you have described her. For my part, having once had a

child of my own, I may hope that she is happy—and that she deserves to be." Mr. Grant uttered all this in a musing tone, as though his mind was dwelling upon other things than those immediately under discussion; but there was much grave tenderness in the sort of benediction with which he concluded. It made Marion's heart go out towards him. She felt sure that he had known some deep love, and grievous sorrow, in his day. Now, he was a lonely old man, but she resolved to be in the place of a daughter to him. She leant her cheek upon her hand, and fell into a reverie, in the midst of which the clock struck eleven.

"Bless me! how late we are keeping you up, Mrs. Lockhart," exclaimed Mr. Grant, shutting up his snuff-box and putting it in his pocket. "The truth is, I have been so long deprived of ladies' society, that now I am prone to presume too much on my good fortune. In future you must help me to keep myself within bounds. Good-night, Madam—I am your most obedient servant. Good-night, my dear Miss Marion; your father must have been a good man: I wish I might have known him. Mr. Lancaster, do you go with me?" The old gentleman was always thus ceremonious in his leave-takings.

"Yes, I'm with you," said Lancaster, breaking

out of a brown study into which he had subsided, and getting briskly to his feet. "I have to thank you for a strange story—an interesting one, I mean."

"Is there so much in it?" said Marion, as she gave him her hand.

"I fancy I see a good deal in it," answered he; adding with a smile, "But then, you know, I call myself a poet!"

The ladies curtseyed; the gentlemen bowed, and went upstairs together.

CHAPTER X.

WHEN Philip Lancaster and Mr. Grant reached the landing at the head of the stairs, they faced each other for a moment; and then, by mutual impulse as it were, Grant tacitly extended, and Philip as tacitly accepted, an invitation to enter the former's room. The mind resembles the heart in this, that it sometimes feels an instinctive and unexplained desire for the society of another mind. Cold and self-sufficient though the intellect is, it cannot always endure solitude and the corrosion of its unimparted thoughts. Therefore some of the

most permanent, though not the most ardent, friendships have been between men whose ground of meeting was exclusively intellectual. But men, for some reason, are not willing to admit this, and generally disguise the fact by a plausible obtrusion of other motives. So Mr. Grant, as he opened the door (after the tacit transaction above-mentioned), said, "Step in, Lancaster, and help me through with a glass of that French cognac and water."

"Thank you, I will," Lancaster replied.

But when the tumblers were filled and tasted, and the liquor was pronounced good, nothing more was said for some minutes. At last Lancaster got up from his chair and began to pace about the room.

"It could be worked up into a good story, that character of the Marquise Desmoines," he said; "at least, as I conceive it. If I were a story-writer instead of a poet, I would attempt it. You would need the right sort of man to bring into collision with her. While I was abroad, I knew a fellow who, I think, would do. Came of good English stock, and had talent—perhaps genius. His father was a poor man, though of noble descent. Gave his son a good early training, followed

up by the university curriculum, and then sent him abroad, with two or three hundred a year income. We'll call him Yorke. The fellow's idea at that time was to enter the Church: he had eloquence when he was moved, a good presence, and a sort of natural benevolence or humanity, the result of a healthy constitution and digestion, and radical ignorance of the wickedness of this world. The truth probably was that his benevolence was condescension, and his humanity, good-nature. As for religion, he looked at it from the poetical side, saw that it was susceptible of a pleasant symbolism, that the theory of right and wrong gave plenty of scope for the philosophical subtlety and profundity in which he imagined himself proficient, and that all he would have to do, as the professional representative of religious ideas, would be to preach poetical sermons, be the expectancy and rose of his fair parishioners, the glass of goodness and the mould of self-complacency. He thought everybody would be led by him and glorify him, that his chief difficulty would be to keep their piety within practical bounds; and that the devil himself would go near to break his sinful old heart because he could not be numbered among the disciples of so inspired a young prig. It was a lovely conception, wasn't it? but he

never got so far with it as even to experience its idiocy. His first bout with theological and ecclesiastical lore was enough for him. He found himself the captive of a prison house of dogmas, superstitions, and traditions, instead of the lord of a palace of freedom, beauty, and blankverse. If this was religion, he was made for something better; and he began to look about him in search of it. There were plenty of ideas masquerading about just then in the guise of freedom, and flaring the penny dip of rationality in people's faces; and this fellow—what's his name?—Yorke, gave courteous entertainment to several of them. A German university is as good a place as another to indulge in that sort of dissipation. Freedom—that was the word; the right of a man to exploit his nature from the top to the bottom—and having arrived at the bottom, to sit down there and talk about the top. He had two or three years of this, and arrived at such proficiency that he could give a reason for everything, especially for those things that suited his inclination of the moment; and could prove to demonstration that the proper moral attitude of man was heels-in-the-air and head downwards. But unluckily human nature is not inexhaustible, at all events in the case of any single individual. The prospect may be large

enough, but he only walks in such few paths as are comfortably accessible to him; and as time goes on, his round of excercise gets more and more contracted, until at last he does little more than turn round on one heel, in the muddiest corner of the whole estate. As Yorke, owing perhaps to the superior intellectual and moral organisation on which he prided himself, arrived at this corner rather more speedily than the majority of his associates, he was better able than they to recognise its muddiness: and since mud, quâ mud, was not irresistibly delightful to him, and he was not as yet inextricably embedded in it, he thought it worth while to try and get out of it; and made shift tolerably well to do so, though no doubt carrying plenty of stains along with him. All this time he had been secretly giving way to attacks of poetry, more or less modelled upon the Byron and Shelley plan; one day he took these scraps out of the portfolio in which he had hidden them, read them over, thought there was genius in them here and there, and made up his mind to be a great poet. There are always poetasters enough; but of great poets, you know, there are never so many as not to leave room for one or two more."

"Here, then," observed Mr. Grant, who had

followed this history with complete attention—indeed, he was an excellent listener—"here, then, you and Mr. Yorke were on sympathetic ground. It was probably t this epoch that you formed his acquaintance."

"I came to know him very well then, at all events," replied Lancaster, taking a sip from his tumbler, and then resuming his walk up and down the room. "He had a curiously mixed character. It was difficult to help liking him at first sight. He was handsome, cheerful, many-sided, easy-natured; but though he loved his ease, both of mind and body, he was capable on occasion of great physical or mental exertion. He was more comprehensive than commanding; but perhaps he seemed less strong than he really was, because he doubted the essential expediency or virtue of any particular line of conduct; and would rather observe the leadership of others than lead himself. He had great intuitive insight into the moral constitution of other people, but was not so keen-eyed towards his own structure; in considering an event, he had the habit of taking it upon its artistic or symbolical side—it was a device to parry the touch of realities. But often he allowed his imagination to get him into real scrapes—magine himself to be this or that person, for

instance, and act the character into actual consequences. He had a genial way with him, and shunned giving direct pain, or coming into hostile collision with anybody; but the reason of that was, not the generous humanity of a powerful spirit, but the knowledge of a secret weakness that was in him, and a fear of revealing it. This weakness was a passionate, violent temper, which, once he had given way to it, would strip him of dignity and self-restraint, and uncover all manner of hatreds, revenges, jealousies, burning envies, and remorseless cruelties. There was nothing noble in his rage: it was underhand and malignant. In fact, subtlety was at the very base of his nature: so that he would constantly be secret and stealthy when there was no reason for it: he would conceal a hundred things which he might more conveniently to himself have left open; he would give a false impression when he might more advantageously to himself have told the truth; though I never met a man who could upon occasion speak the naked truth more boldly and recklessly than he. I should say he was by instinct and organisation a coward, but a brave man by determination. Back to a certain point he would yield and yield; but then he would leap out and fight like a mad tiger. He was liable to wicked conceptions;

although, whether from constitution or caution, he commonly did what was right, and did not like to be suspected of acts of which he secretly knew himself either guilty or capable. In short, there was an ignoble, treacherous region, underlying his visible and better character, which he made use of that better character to disguise. The peril he stood in was, lest the baser nature should get the upper hand; and if he was saved from that, it was, I should say, by virtue of what may be called his genius. It was his good genius, in more senses than one. It filled his imagination with lofty images: when his pen was in his hand, no man was more pure-minded, well-balanced, and upright than he. In those moods he was even reverential, which in practical affairs he never was. The custom of those moods influenced him like association with good men and women; or like some beneficent spell, which should suspend the action of a poison until either it lost its virulence, or he had recovered strength enough to disregard it. Have you heard enough about my friend Yorke?"

In putting this abrupt question, Lancaster stopped as abruptly in his walk, and fixed his eyes upon Mr. Grant, who lifted his face and met the look thoughtfully.

"'Tis a portrait not devoid of life and substance, and does credit to your discernment more than to your charity," he replied. "But the features are in a measure typical; I have met men who resembled him, and therefore I may modify your interpretation by my own. With all his sensitiveness to rebuke and his fair-seeming, was he not a man given to self-depreciation?"

"Sometimes—yes."

"The issue of that kind of vanity which would simulate what is dark and terrible, to make the hearers stare. He would not do the evil that he uttered. Besides, he was aware of a certain softness or womanishness in his nature, which his masculine taste condemned, and which he sought to rectify at least in words."

"But that would show a fear to let the truth about himself be known."

"Ay; and a moral indifference to ill repute. On the other hand, I doubt not he often sinned in thought, when a physical or mental fastidiousness withheld him from fixing his thought in action. As to his genius, I grant you it was purgative to him; but less because it put him in noble company than because it gave vent through the imagination, and with artistic balance, to the wickedness which might else have forced a less

harmless outlet. You say his general bearing was genial ?"

"Yes; but his bearing was often much pleasanter than his feelings. He disliked to say or hear ugly words: though he could write savage letters, and could imagine himself being very stern in intercourse; but when he came to the point, he was apt to sweeten off—more, I think, from dread of being tempted to lose his temper than from natural kindliness."

"You judge him too harshly, because too minutely. Every human motive has its shady side. He was a man—if I may hazard an opinion—who was never so gay and good humoured as under specially trying or perilous circumstances: upon slighter occasions he might be less agreeable."

"You have chanced upon a truth there," said Lancaster, apparently somewhat impressed by his interlocutor's sagacity. "We were once in a boat together on the Lake of Geneva, and a storm put us in imminent danger of our lives for a couple of hours. He was laughing and jesting all the time—not cynically or mockingly, but from genuine light-heartedness. Perhaps you can explain that?"

"No further than to remind you that great or dangerous crises burn the pretence out of a man

and leave him sincere: and then it will be known, to others as well as to himself, whether he be brave or craven. In the case of your friend Yorke, with his dread of being accused of fine feelings, imminent peril would annul that dread, because he would perceive that no one about him was likely to be in a state of mind serene enough to be critical: therefore his self-consciousness would leave him, and he would become his spontaneous self. The chief vice of your friend seems to me, indeed, to be that same self-consciousness. He would be for ever watching and speculating about himself. Pray, did you consider him of a fickle disposition?"

"He has given many instances of it, both in mind and heart."

"Nevertheless," rejoined Mr. Grant, taking a pinch of snuff between his fingers, and regarding Lancaster with a smile of quiet penetration—"nevertheless, I will wager that he was, at bottom, no more fickle than you or I. His fickleness was of the surface merely: within, he was perhaps more constant than most men."

"You speak confidently, sir."

"Nay, I am no conjuror, nor no dogmatist either. Your friend's character is, in reality, not quite so complex as it appears. What are its

main elements? Powerful imagination, independence, affability, love of approbation, evidenced by the pride that veils it; a sceptical habit of conversation, to conceal a perhaps too credulous faith, unweariable spiritual curiosity, noble ideals; modesty, unless depreciated, sensitiveness to beauty, and docility unless opposed. That enumeration might be condensed, but let it pass. Here, then, we have a man open to an unusual variety of impressions, and fond of experimenting on himself; in the habit, therefore, of regarding himself as a third person. What more probable than that such a man should imagine changes in his beliefs or affections, and should amuse himself by acting as if those changes were actual? Yet, when it came to some vital matter, his deeper-rooted sense of right and justice would take the reins again, and curb the vagaries of his fancy."

"But it might happen," said Lancaster, "that some person became involved in this amusing experiment of his, who should mistake the experiment for earnest. What would my friend's sense of right and justice have to say to that?"

"Nay, that lies between him and his conscience," quoth Mr. Grant, applying the pinch of snuff to his nostrils, "and you and I have no concern with it."

Lancaster took a couple of turns up and down the room, and then seated himself in a chair at the opposite side of the table. "Enough about my friend Yorke," he said; "between your analysis and mine, he has grown too big for his share in the story. What I intended was to bring him into relations with a woman who should be a match for him: and this Marquise Desmoines, as I conceive her, will answer the purpose as well as another. Even while yet a girl at school, she had, as Marion's anecdote showed, the instinct of woman's power and conquest. She had already divided the human race into male and female, and had appraised the weapons available on her side. She had perceived that the weak point of woman is the heart, and was resolved to fence her own with triple steel. To marry a rich foreign nobleman of more than thrice her age was precisely her affair. She would have the world before her, as well as at her feet. She was—I imagine her to have been—beautiful, dimpled, luxurious, sceptical, and witty. She was energetic by nature, selfish by philosophy, clever and worldly-wise by training. She could appreciate you like a friend, rally you like critic, flatter and wheedle you like a mistress. She would caress you one moment, scoff at you the next, and put you in the wrong be your

argument what it might. She could speak in double-meanings, startle you, deceive you, and forgive you. She was fond of intrigue for its own sake, fertile in resources and expedients; she was wilful and wayward from calculation, and dangerous at all times. She was indolently despotic, fond of playing with her sensations, and amusing herself with her passions. She was the heroine of a hundred perilous anecdotes, which showed rather the audacity of genius than commonplace impropriety. She could say with grace and charm things that no other woman could say at all. She could assume a fatal innocence and simplicity; and to have seen her blush was an unforgettable experience in a man's life. Physical exercise, especially dancing and riding, were indispensable to her; her toilettes, baths, clothes, and equipment were ideals of luxury. She was superstitious, because she believed in no religion; indifferent to inflicting suffering, because never suffering herself; but she loved the pleasure of pleasing, was kindly in disposition, mindful of benefits as well as of injuries; and in her loftier moods she could be royally or savagely generous, as well as fiercely implacable. She had a lawyer's head for business; was a better companion for men than for women; was even capable of genuine friendship, and could give sound and honest advice:

and it was at such times that the real power and maturity of her understanding were revealed. That is the sort of woman that the plot of my story requires her to have been. When Yorke met her she was the Circe of a distinguished company of noblemen, authors, actors, artists, abbés, soldiers, wits, and humourists; all of whom, by her magic, she could cause to assume the forms of turkey-cocks, magpies, poodles, monkeys, hogs, puppies, parrots, boa-constrictors, and other animals, according to their several dispositions. But Yorke was the Ulysses upon whom her spells had only so much effect as to incline him to spend most of his time in her company."

Here Lancaster paused, and drank off the remains of his tumbler of brandy-and-water.

"Well?" said Mr. Grant, moving the bottle towards him.

"No more, thank you," said Lancaster.

"You are not going to leave your drama just as the curtain is ready to go up?"

"I have come to the end of my invention."

"Ah! I should scarce have thought you had begun upon it, as yet," returned the other drily.

Lancaster made no reply. At last Mr. Grant said, "Unless my genealogical inferences are at

fault, you and Sir Francis Bendibow should be of kin."

"It is one of the impertinences of human society," said Lancaster, with a twitching of his eyebrows, "that whatever filibuster happens to marry the sister of your father, has a right to call you nephew. It might as reasonably be decreed that because I happen to cut the throat of some hook-nosed old money-lender his women and children would have the right to style themselves my cousins and aunts. That law might, to be sure, prove a beneficial one, for it would do more than hanging to put a stop to murder. But the other law makes marriage a nuisance; and one of these days the nephews will arise and compel its repeal at the sword's point. Meanwhile, I remain the baronet's nephew and your humble servant."

"You would abolish all but blood-relatives, then?" said Mr. Grant, resting his elbows on the arms of his chair and interlacing his fingers.

"I would have no 'buts'; abolish the whole of them!" exclaimed Lancaster; "even the rich uncles and the pretty cousins. Take a leaf from the book of animals, and let each human creature stand on his own basis, and do the best he can with it. When I found a republic, there shall be

no genealogies and no families. So long as they exist, we shall never know what we are really made of."

"The Bendibow Bank is, however, a highly prosperous and trustworthy concern?"

"You must get my uncle to sing its eulogies for you; I know nothing. But I am of opinion that Miss Marion Lockhart has an intuition for detecting humbugs. That Charles Grantley affair . . . . is none of mine. But Sir Francis had two sides to him in his youth, and there may be some passages in his account book that he would deprecate publishing."

"Ah! I had contemplated calling at the bank to-morrow——"

"Oh, don't interpret my prejudices and antipathies as counsel," interrupted the young man, throwing back his hair from his forehead and smiling. "The bank is as sound as the Great Pyramid. I doubt not. Bless your heart, everybody banks there! If they ruin you, you will have all the best folks in London for your fellow-bankrupts. I'm afraid I've bored you shamefully; but a little brandy goes a long way with me."

"You have said nothing that has failed to interest me," returned the old gentleman courteously. "As you may conceive, I find myself somewhat

lonely. In twenty years. such friends as may have been mine in England have disappeared; and the circumstances in which those years have been passed—in India—have precluded my finding others. At your age, one can afford to wish to abolish kindred, but by the time you have lived thirty years longer, you may understand how I would rather wish to create new kindred in the place of those whom fate has abolished for me. Human beings need one another, Mr. Lancaster: God has no other way of ministering to us than through our fellow-creatures. I esteem myself fortunate, therefore, in having met with yourself, and with these kind ladies. You cannot know me, as the vanished friends I spoke of would know me—my origin, my early life, my ambitions, my failures; but you can know me as an inoffensive old gentleman, whose ambition, for the rest of his life, is to make himself agreeable to somebody. If you and I had been young men together in London, thirty years ago, doubtless we might have found ourselves in accord on many points of speculation and philosophy, wherein, now, I should be disposed to challenge some of your conclusions. But intellectual agreement is not the highest basis of friendship between man and man. I, at all events, have been led by experience to value men for

what I think they are, more than for what they think they think. I will make no other comment than that on the brilliant and ingenious . . . . confidence, shall I call it?—with which you have honoured me to-night. If it should ever occur to you to present me to your friend Yorke, under his true name, I am sure that I should enjoy his acquaintance, and that I should recognise him from your description. Perhaps he might be able to reinforce your invention as to the Marquise Perdita. Well, well, I am detaining you. Good-night!"

Lancaster coloured a little at the latter sentences, and a cloud passed over his face; but in another moment his eyebrows lifted with a smile. "God knows what induces me to masquerade so," he said. "I care to conceal myself only from those who can see nothing on any terms—which is certainly not your category. Let Yorke and Lancaster be one in future. As for Perdita . . . . there goes twelve o'clock! I was startled at hearing her name to-night; she has just returned to London in the capacity of widow. It only needed that . . . . however, what is that to you! Good-night."

"Perdita! a pretty name, is it not?" said Mr. Grant musingly, as he followed the other to the door. "It makes one hope there may be some leaven of Shakespeare's Perdita in her, after all."

"'Tis an ominous name, though; too ominous, in this case, for even Shakespeare to save it, I'm afraid," returned Lancaster. With that he went out, and left Mr. Grant to his meditations.

CHAPTER XI.

THE next day Mr. Grant hired a saddle-horse, and rode up to London, where, among other business, he made the call at the Bendibow Bank which has been already mentioned. His affair with that institution having been arranged, presumably to the satisfaction of both parties, Mr. Grant set out on his return home. As it was already six o'clock, however, he stopped at the "Holy Lands" hotel in the Strand, where he dined. By the time he was ready to resume his journey it was nearly dark, the rather as the night was moonless, and the sky was overlaid with heavy clouds. Partly because he fancied it would save him some distance, he took the northern or Uxbridge road, instead of that which goes through Kensington. After passing the north-west corner of Kensington Gardens, this road lay through a region which was, at that epoch, practically uninhabited. Mr.

Grant rode easily along, absorbed in thought, and only occasionally taking note of his direction. He was a practised horseman, and riding was as natural to him as walking. It was a very still night, though a storm might be brewing; and the only sounds audible to Mr. Grant's ears were the steady tramp of his horse's feet, the slight creaking of the saddle, and the rattle of the bit as the animal flung up his head. By-and-by, however, the rider fancied he heard the noise of another horse's hoofs beating the road at a gallop, and coming up behind him. He drew his left rein a little, and glanced over his shoulder.

Meanwhile, at Mrs. Lockhart's house in Hammersmith, dinner was ready at the usual time; but as Mr. Grant did not appear, it was resolved to wait for him. He had informed Mrs. Lockhart, previous to setting out, that it was his intention to go to London, and added that he might be detained some hours by business. No anxiety was felt, therefore: but, as Marion observed, dinner would not seem like dinner without Mr. Grant; and it was not worth while sitting down to table so long as any chance remained of his being present. Accordingly, the dishes were put to warm in front of the kitchen fire; and Marion and Lancaster went to the piano, and tried to set to music

some words that the latter had written. But singing conduces to appetite; and appetite will get the better even of sentiment. When more than half an hour had added itself to the abyss of the past, it was generally admitted that Mr. Grant was hopelessly derelict, and neglectful of his social duties: the dishes were brought in from the kitchen, and the trio seated themselves at table, with Mr. Grant's chair gaping vacantly at them all.

Now, whether a man be well or ill spoken of behind his back depends not so much upon the man himself as upon those who speak of him; but probably the worst thing that can happen to him is not to be spoken of at all. Mr. Grant fared well in all respects; he was spoken of, he was well spoken of by honest people; and it may not be too much to add, that he was not undeserving of having honest people speak well of him. The goodness of some good men is a long time in getting the recognition that it deserves; that of others is appreciated at once; nor does it follow that the latter's virtues are necessarily shallower or less honourable than those of the former. Ten days ago, for example, Mr. Grant had been as good as non-existent to the three persons who were now discussing him with so much interest and even affection. There was something

in his face, in his glance, in the gradual, kindly brightening of his smile, in the pleasant melody of his voice, in the manly repose of his general walk and conversation, that inevitably inspired respect and liking in such persons as were disinterestedly susceptible of those sentiments. And yet, Mr. Grant was far from being handsome either in face or figure; and no one knew what his life had been, what was his social position, whether he were rich or poor, or wherefore he was living in lodgings at Hammersmith: none of which subjects of inquiry are apt to be disregarded in the life of a country so compact and inquisitive as England. But even in England, sheer and naked individuality has vast weight, altogether unaccountable upon any general theory whatever: and Mr. Grant was in this way the passive subject of a special social dispensation.

"He told me last night," remarked Lancaster, "that he had been living in India for the last twenty years. I had been puzzling myself whom he reminded me of—physically, I mean; and that enlightened me. You have probably seen the man, Mrs. Lockhart. I saw him the year he was acquitted, when I was eight or nine years old; and I never forgot his face—Warren Hastings."

Mrs. Lockhart replied that she had never

seen Mr. Hastings, but she was sure Mr. Grant bore no resemblance to him in character. Mr. Hastings was a cruel and ambitious man; whereas Mr. Grant was the most humane man she had ever known, except the Major, and as simple as a child.

"There is mystery about him, too," said Lancaster.

"Not the kind of mystery that makes you suspicious, though," said Marion. "I feel that what he hides would make us like him better if we knew it."

"What I hide is of another colour," Lancaster observed.

"I'm sure it can be nothing bad," said Mrs. Lockhart.

Marion broke out, "So am I! Mr. Lancaster thinks it would be picturesque and poetical to be wicked, and so he is always talking about it. If he had really done anything wicked, he would be too vain to make a mystery of it; he could not help telling. But he has only been good so far, and he has not outgrown being ashamed of it. If he had committed more sins, the people in his poetry would have committed much fewer."

When Marion struck, she struck with all her might, and reckless of consequences. Mrs. Lock-

hart sat appalled, and Lancaster winced a little; but he was able to say good-humouredly, "I shall give up being a hypocrite; everybody finds me out. If I were a whited sepulchre, detection would not humiliate me: but when a bottle labelled 'Poison' is found to contain nothing worse than otto of roses, it can never hold up its head again."

"Anybody can say what they please," rejoined Marion; "but what they do is all that amounts to anything."

"That is to say, you are deaf, but you have eyes."

"That is a more poetical way of putting it, I suppose. But some words are as good as deeds, and I can hear those."

"It is not your seeing or hearing that troubles me, but your being able to read. If I had only been born an Arab or an ancient Hebrew, I might have written without fear of your criticism."

"I suppose you wish me to say that I would learn those languages for the express purpose of enjoying your poetry. But I think you are lucky in having to write in plain English. It is the most difficult of all languages to be wicked in—genteelly wicked, at least!"

"You convince me, however, that it must

have been the original language spoken by Job's wife, when she advised him to curse God and die If she had been as much a mistress of it as you are, I think he would have done it."

"If he had been a poet, 'tis very likely."

"I hope," said Mrs. Lockhart with gentle simplicity, "that nothing has happened to Mr. Grant."

Lancaster and Marion both turned their faces towards the window, and then Lancaster got up from the table—they had finished dinner—and looked out. "It has grown dark very suddenly," he remarked. "I fear Mr. Grant will get wet if he does not return soon."

Marion also arose and stood at the other side of the window. After a while she said, "I should like to be out in such a night as this."

"I hate darkness," returned Lancaster. "Come what come may, as long as I have a light to see it by."

"I love darkness, because then I can see my mind. When father was alive, and I had more time to do what I wished, I used to be awake at night as much as in the daytime."

"Your mind must be fuller of light than most people's, if you can see it only in the darkness."

"I am light-minded—is that what you mean?"

"No, I am serious. You never are serious except when you are angry."

"If I am never serious, I must be light-minded. Very likely I am light-headed, too, sometimes; mother has often told me so. I like to be out in the rain, and to get my feet wet and muddy. I should like to have been a soldier in my father's regiment; he said I would make a good soldier."

"And shoot Frenchmen?"

"I prefer killing with a sword. Washing dishes and marketing becomes tiresome after a while. I shall probably kill the baker or the greengrocer some day; I have a terrible temper, and if I don't let it have its way once in a while it will become worse. Hitherto I have only broken dishes; but that is not terrible enough."

"I'll be hanged if I can understand you," said Lancaster, after a pause.

"You are such a handsome man, you don't need to understand people. The object of understanding people is to get the better of them; but when one is handsome, people open their doors at once."

"Then, why don't you open yours?"

"If I don't, it is as much on your account as on mine."

"How is that?"

"When I tell you that, I shall have told you a great deal. But why didn't you protest that you had no notion you were handsome, and that I was a flatterer?"

"I know I'm handsome, and I'm glad of it."

"Do you often speak the truth like that?"

"You get more truth out of me than I suspected of being in me. But, if, some day, you provoke me to some truth that I had better have kept to myself, it will be your fault."

"I don't think there is much danger. I like this first truth of yours. If I were handsome I should be glad of it, too. Ugly women are suspicious, designing, and jealous. They talk about the charms of a cultivated intelligence being superior, in the long run, to beauty. But beauty does not wait for the long run—it wins at once, and lets the cultivated intelligence run on to Jericho, if it likes. I imagine most cultivated intelligences would be thankful to be fools, if they could afford it."

"But beauty doesn't always imply folly."

"Oh, I am speaking of women!"

"Thank you. But, speaking of women, what have you to say to the Marquise Desmoines, for instance?"

"So, you know her?"

"I heard you speak of her last night as being both beautiful and clever."

"But, you know her?"

"I ran across her abroad," said Lancaster, with an indifferent air. But before saying it he had hesitated for a moment, and Marion had noticed the hesitation.

"How did you like the Marquis?" she inquired.

"He was a very distinguished old gentleman, very punctilious, and very bilious. He always wore a red ribbon in his button-hole, and sat in a large armchair; and four times a day he had a glass of absinthe. 'Tis a wonder he lived so long."

"Oh, did he die?"

"He is dead."

"What did you do then?"

"I did not know of it until a few days ago. He has been dead six months."

"Then, Perdita is in England!" said Marion rapidly, meeting Lancaster's glance with her own. Except when she was angry, or for some other reason forgot herself, she habitually avoided another person's glance. For she was of an extremely sensitive, nervous temperament, and the "personal equation" of those with whom she conversed, affected her more than physical contact would affect other people.

At this point the dialogue was interrupted by a startling glare of lightning, succeeded almost immediately by a crash of thunder so loud and so heavy as to rattle the window in its frame and jar the floor on which they stood. Marion laughed, and, opening the window, leaned out. Mrs. Lockhart, who had fallen into a gentle doze in her chair, awoke with a little jump and an exclamation.

"Oh, Marion . . . what has gone off? Mr. Grant? Why is the window open? Dear heart! is that the rain? He will be drenched to the skin, Mr. Lancaster."

"So will you, if you don't shut the window," said Lancaster to Marion.

She looked round and appeared to answer; but her words were inaudible in the thunderpeal that accompanied them. The rain drove straight downwards with such force and weight that the drops might have been liquid lead. The sky was black.

"I shall take an umbrella and go out and meet him," Marion was now heard to say.

"Oh, my child, you are mad!" cried Mrs. Lockhart. "Do put down the window, Mr. Lancaster."

Lancaster complied. Marion glanced at him with an odd, quizzical kind of a smile. He did not know what she meant; but he joined Mrs. Lockhart in denouncing Marion's project as impossible.

"He would be as wet as he is capable of being before you found him," he said; "besides, he couldn't use an umbrella on horseback; and even if you knew where he was and which road he was coming by, it's a hundred to one you'd miss him in a night like this."

"La! what a regiment of reasons," she answered, with her short irregular laugh. "I only wanted a reason for going out. As to being of use to Mr. Grant, 'twould be but a chance, of course; but so is everything, for that matter."

She did not persist in her attention, however, but began to move restlessly about the room, and made no answer to several remarks that her mother and Lancaster addressed to her.

When nearly half an hour had passed away, her bearing and aspect suddenly changed; she went swiftly out of the room, shutting the door behind her. Then the outside door was heard to open, and Marion's step going down to the gate, which was likewise flung back. Then, after a minute's silence, the sound of voices; and Lancaster,

peering out of the window, saw, by the aid of an accommodating flash of lightning. Marion and Mr. Grant (who was without his hat) coming up the paved way to the porch.

"What a strange thing!" he exclaimed. "How could she possibly have known he was coming?"

"Marion has wonderful ears," said Mrs. Lockhart, with a sigh, as if the faculty were in some way deleterious to the possessor of it. But Lancaster thought that something else besides fine hearing was involved in this matter.

The girl now came in, her cheeks flushed, her hair, face, and shoulders wet, conducting Mr. Grant with her arm under his. He was splashed and smeared with mud, and looked very pale; but he smiled, and said with his usual courteousness, "I am not going to spoil your carpet and chairs, dear madam. I do but show you my plight, like a truant schoolboy who has tumbled into the gutter; and then I retire for repairs."

"No: you shall sit down here," said Marion, determinedly but quietly; and in despite of himself she led him to the stuffed easy-chair which her mother had just quitted, and forced him into it. "Mr. Grant has had some hurt," she added to the others; and to Lancaster, "Go up to his room and bring down his dressing-gown. Mother, get some

water heated in the kitchen. I will attend to him."

Her manner to the old man was full of delicate and sympathetic tenderness; to the others, of unceremonious authority. Lancaster went on his errand with a submissive docility that surprised himself. He had seen a great deal of Marion in the last few hours; but he was not sure that he had seen into her very far.

When he returned with the dressing-gown, Marion had got Mr. Grant's coat off, and was wiping the mud from a bruised place on his right hand with her wetted handkerchief. "Nothing dangerous, thank God!" she was saying, in a soothing undertone, as Lancaster approached.

"You got a fall?" asked the latter of the elder man, who nodded in reply. Marion said brusquely, "Don't you see that he is too exhausted to talk? Wait, and you will know everything."

In truth, Mr. Grant appeared a good deal shaken, and for several minutes could do little more than accept passively the ministrations bestowed upon him. Marion continued to direct the operations, the others assisting with abundant goodwill. At last Mr. Grant said,

"It is very pleasant to find you all so kind —to be so well taken care of. I fear I'm ruining

your chair, Mrs. Lockhart. There was really no need for this. I am none the worse, except for the loss of a hat. Thank you, my dear, you are very good."

"Have you had your dinner?" inquired Mrs. Lockhart.

"Yes, I am obliged to you, madam. I was belated, and . . . But you must hear my adventure. I thought the highwaymen days were over in this neighbourhood."

"I wish I had been with you!" murmured Marion resentfully.

"Highwaymen? oh!" faltered Mrs. Lockhart.

"My highwayman was not so ceremonious as the best of the old-fashioned ones," continued Mr. Grant, smiling. "He came upon me just before the storm broke. I heard his horse overtaking me at a gallop, and I drew aside to let him pass. But he rode right against me—he was mounted on a very powerful animal—and nearly threw me down. As I turned towards him, he held a pistol in his hand and fired at me. The ball knocked off my hat, and missed me. I had a heavy riding-whip, an I struck at him with it. I think I must have hit him across the wrist; at all events, he dropped the pistol. Neither of us had spoken a word. It was at that moment that the first flash

of lightning came. It showed me that he was a large man, dressed in dark clothes; he put his arm across his face, as if to prevent my seeing it. The thunder was very loud, and my horse plunged and burst his girths; and I slipped to the ground. What with the rain and the noise, and the suddenness of it all, I was confused, and hardly knew what happened for a few moments. When I got on my feet again I was alone; my highwayman had disappeared; and so had my horse, though I picked it up on the road later."

"He may have thought, from your falling, that he had not missed his shot after all," said Lancaster.

"It was the lightning that frightened him away," said Marion. "He counted on darkness, and dared not risk recognition."

"How did you get home? did you have to walk?" asked Mr. Lockhart.

"Only a short distance. A waggon happened to come along, and the driver gave me a lift as far as the corner. And there Marion met me. What spirit told you I was coming, my dear?"

Marion replied only by a smile.

"It seems singular," remarked Lancaster, "that he should have ridden at you and fired at once, instead of going through the customary formality.

of inquiring whether you preferred your life to your purse. Those fellows are usually more cautious, for their own sakes."

"He was as much afraid of having his voice heard as of having his face seen," said Marion. "He wished to kill Mr. Grant more than to rob him. You didn't have much money with you, did you?"

"Not much, as it happened, my dear: though, as I had been to the Bank, whoever had taken the trouble to follow my movements might have inferred that I did have."

"The Bendibow Bank?" demanded Marion.

"Yes; I introduced myself to your friend Sir Francis."

Lancaster chanced to be looking at Marion, and noticed a troubled expression pass across her face. She laid her hand lightly on Mr. Grant's shoulder, and passed it down his arm; the action seemed at once affectionate and reproachful. "You disapprove of that, don't you?" the young man said to her, smiling.

The question appeared to annoy her; "I am glad he got home," she said coldly. Then she got up and went out of the room.

CHAPTER XII.

TOWARDS the close of the month, Sir Francis Bendibow, having seriously turned the matter over in his mind, wrote a note to his solicitor, Merton Fillmore, asking him whether he could spare time to come over to the bank that afternoon and have a chat with him. This note he despatched to Mr. Fillmore by a private messenger, who was instructed to wait for an answer. In half an hour the messenger returned, and Sir Francis read the following:

"Dear Bendibow,—I don't see my way to come to you to-day. If you have anything particular to say, dine with me at my house this evening at seven o'clock.—Yours truly, Merton Fillmore."

"Well, perhaps that will answer better, after all," murmured the baronet, folding the paper up again with sombre thoughtfulness. "He gives you a decent dinner, too." So, punctually at seven o'clock, Sir Francis's carriage drove up to Mr. Fillmore's door: the footman gave a loud double knock,

and the baronet, in black tights and ruffled shirt, was ushered into his host's presence.

Though a solicitor, Merton Fillmore was an English gentleman, of Scotch descent on his mother's side, and more Scotch than English in personal appearance; being of good height and build, lean, bony, and high-featured, with well-formed and powerful hands, carefully groomed finger nails, short reddish whiskers, and bushy eyebrows. His eyes were dark blue, sometimes appearing black; clear and unflinching in their gaze. The head above was well balanced, the forehead very white, and hollowed at the temples. His movements were quiet and undemonstrative: when speaking at any length, he habitually pressed his clenched right hand into the palm of his left, and kept it there. At the end of a sentence, he would make his handsome lips meet together with a grave decisiveness of expression. His voice had unexpected volume and depth; it could be resonant and ear-filling without any apparent effort on the speaker's part; it could also sink until it was just above a whisper, yet always with a keen distinctness of enunciation that rendered it more audible than mere vociferousness. Soft or melodious it never was; but its masculine fibre and vibration were far from unpleasing to most ears, certainly to most

feminine ones. Fillmore, however, was a bachelor: and though still a little on the hither side of forty, he did not seem likely to change his condition. He threw himself with unweariable energy into his profession; it almost monopolised his time and his thoughts. He saw a good deal of society; but he had never, so far as was known, seen any woman who, to his thinking, comprised in herself all the attractions and benefits that society had to offer. He might, indeed, have been considered cold, but that was probably not so much the case as it superficially appeared to be.

That he should have chosen the solicitor's branch of the legal profession was a puzzle to most people. His social position (his father had been a gentleman, living upon his own income, and there was no economical reason why Merton should not have done the same) would naturally have called him to the Bar. It can only be said that the work of a solicitor, bringing him as it did into immediate contact with the humours, the ambitions, the disputes, and the weaknesses of mankind, suited his peculiar genius better than the mere logical partisanship of the barrister. He cared more to investigate and arrange a case than to plead it before a jury. He liked to have people

come to him and consult him; to question them, to weigh their statements against his own insight, to advise them, to take their measure; to disconcert them or to assist them. He by no means cared to bring all the suits on which he was consulted before the court; on the contrary, he uniformly advised his clients to arrange their disputes privately, furnishing them at the same time with such sound reasons for so doing, and with such equitable advice as to a basis of agreement, as to gain for himself the reputation of an arbitrator rather than of an advocate. Nevertheless, whenever it became necessary to push matters to an extremity, the side which Merton Fillmore was known to have espoused was considered to be already half victorious. No other solicitor in London, in fact, had anything like the reputation of Merton Fillmore; he was among his fellows what Mr. Adolphus or Mr. Serjeant Runnington was among barristers. But his acquaintance with the domestic secrets of London fashionable society was affirmed, doubtless with reason, to be more extensive than that of any physician, confidential clergyman, or private detective in the metropolis; he held in his hand the reputation and prosperity of many a man and woman whom the world delighted to honour. Such a position is not attained by mere

intellectual ability or natural ingenuity; it demands that rare combination of qualities which may be termed social statesmanship; prominent among which is the power of inspiring others with the conviction that their revelations will be at least as safe in the hearer's possession as in their own; and that he is broadly and disinterestedly tolerant of human frailties. Most men, in order to achieve success and eminence, require the spur of necessity or of ambition; but it is doubtful whether Fillmore would have been so eminent as he was, had either ambition or necessity been his prompter. He loved what he did for its own sake, and not any ulterior object. From the social standpoint he had nothing to desire, and pecuniarily he was independent. What he made with one hand in his profession, he frequently gave away with the other; but no one knew the details of his liberality except those who were its objects. He seldom spoke cordially of anyone; but few were more often guilty of kindly acts. He was a man with whom nobody ventured to take a liberty, yet who spoke his mind without ceremony to everyone. No one could presume to call Merton Fillmore his friend; yet, no honest man ever found him unfriendly. He was no conventional moralist, but he distinguished sharply between a bad heart and a good

one. These antitheses might be produced indefinitely; but enough has been said.

Fillmore lived in a handsome house in the then fashionable district of London. It was one of the best furnished and appointed houses in the town; for Fillmore was a man whose naturally fine taste had been improved by cultivation. During his annual travels on the Continent he had collected a number of good pictures and other works of art, which were so disposed about his rooms as to show that their owner knew what they were. The machinery by which his domestic economy moved was so well ordered as to be invisible; you never remarked how good his servants were, because you never remarked them at all. Once a week he gave dinners, never inviting more than five guests at a time; and once a month this dinner was followed by a reception. People renowned in all walks of life were to be met with there. Lord Byron made his appearance there several times—a young man of splendid eyes and an appalling reputation, which his affable and rather reticent bearing scarcely seemed to justify; Lady Caroline Lamb, who was supposed to be very much in love with him, and to whom his lordship was occasionally rather impolite; William Godwin, a dark little creature, too ugly not to

be clever, but rather troublesome to converse with; a tall black-haired man, superbly handsome, in clerical garb—a man whose great black eyes had seen more trouble than was wholesome for their owner—who, indeed, as Hazlitt once remarked to Fillmore, would probably have been a great deal better if he hadn't been so damned good; an agreeable little Irish lady, the author of an irretrievably moral work for the young, entitled "Frank"; a small-chinned, lustrous-eyed, smiling, fervent gentleman, who had written a number of graceful essays and poems, and who also, oddly enough, was editor of a terrific Radical journal with a motto from Defoe; a short, rather stout, Italian-looking fellow, with a flashing face and forcible gesticulation, the best actor of his day, and a great topper; another stoutish man of a very different complexion with a countenance like a humanised codfish, thin parched lips that always hung open, pale blue prominent eyes, and an astonishing volubility of philosophical speculative dogmatism; a fastidious, elderly, elegant, womanish, sentimental poetaster named Samuel Rogers, who looked not unlike a diminished Sir Francis Bendibow with the spine taken out; and, in short, a number of persons who were of considerable importance in their own day, and have become more or less so

since then. He would be hard to please who could not find someone to his mind in Merton Fillmore's drawing-room.

Sir Francis Bendibow, on the evening with which we are at present concerned, had a good deal on his mind; but that did not prevent him from enjoying an excellent dinner. He was happy in the possession of a strong and well-balanced physical organisation, upon which age, and a certain amount of free living in youth, had made small inroads. If he had become a trifle stiff or so in his joints, he was still robust and active, and bade fair to outlive many who were his juniors. That injurious chemistry whereby the mind and emotions act upon the animal tissues was but faintly operative with Sir Francis; though it is not to be inferred that he was deficient in mental or in a certain kind of emotional vigour. He and Merton Fillmore were on familiar terms with each other—as familiar as the latter ever was a party to. Fillmore had been the legal adviser of the bank for ten years past, and knew more about it, and about Sir Francis himself, than the baronet was perhaps aware of. But the baronet was thoroughly aware of the solicitor's abilities and force of character, and paid deference thereto by laying aside, when in his company, the air of

courteous superiority which he maintained towards the generality of men. Fillmore's tendency in discussion was towards terseness and directness; he expressed himself in few words, though ordinarily pausing a few moments on the threshold of a sentence. Sir Francis, on the contrary, inclined to be ornamental, intricate, and wavy; not because he was ignorant that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points, but because there was an arabesque bias in him, so to speak, that prompted him to shun straightforwardness as if it were a sort of vulgarity. Sometimes, no doubt, and with some men, this method was effective; as the simple person on foot is outdone by the skater, who at the moment of seeming to accost him face to face, all at once recedes sideways in a wheeling curve that brings him wonderfully behind the other's shoulder. But it was time thrown away to indulge in such caprioles with a man like Merton Fillmore; and, as Sir Francis had the good sense to comprehend this, the two commonly got on together very comfortably.

This evening, however, when the cloth had been drawn, and the invisible servants had disappeared, Fillmore, looking at his guest as he pushed towards him the decanter of claret, per-

ceived that there was something more than usual on his mind. Therefore he said,

"Has that boy of yours been getting into any more scrapes?"

"Not he!" answered the baronet, holding his glass up to the light for a moment, and then turning the contents down his throat. "Poor lad, he's scarce recovered yet from the fall he got off that coach."

They cracked filberts for a while in silence. At last Fillmore said,

"Is the bank doing well?"

"Oh, if it never does any worse, I ought to be satisfied."

"You must look out for a partner," observed Fillmore, after a pause. "Your son will never make a banker. And you won't live for ever."

"The experience I have had with partners has not been encouraging," said Sir Francis, with a melancholy smile. "The boy has plenty of brains, but he's not strong; and, hang it! a spirited young fellow like him must have his fling. Time enough to talk to him about business when he's seen a bit of the world."

"He will see a bit of the next world before long, if you don't keep him better in hand," said Fillmore. "You ought to get a partner. All men

are not Charles Grantleys, if you refer to him. You can do nothing else, unless you intend to marry again."

"I marry again? Good God, Fillmore! If everybody else were as far from that as I am, the child born to-day would see the end of the world. No, no: I'd sooner give up business altogether. There are times, begad, when I wish I had given it up twenty years ago."

The baronet said this with so much emphasis that Fillmore, after looking at him for a few moments, said,

"What times are those, Bendibow?"

"It's rather a long story," the other replied; and hesitated, wrinkling his forehead. As Fillmore kept silence, he presently resumed. "You know what confidence I have always reposed in you. To others I show myself only as the banker or the man of the world; but to you, my dear Fillmore, I have always opened myself without disguise. You comprehend my character; and I suppose you would say that I'm a fair average specimen of the genus homo—eh?'

"If you require my opinion of you, I can give it," replied Fillmore quietly.

"Well, 'tis not often one gets his portrait drawn by an artist like you," said the baronet

laughingly. "'Extenuate naught, nor set down aught in malice,'" as Charley Kean has it. I expect to be edified, I assure you."

"To begin with, your bank is the last place where I should think of putting my money," said Fillmore, with deliberation.

"What the dooce!"

"You may be as prosperous as report says you are," continued Fillmore; "but you are a gambler to the marrow of your bones. You have put money in ventures which promised cent. per cent.; but they were carried on at imminent risk of ruin. If you have not been ruined, you have only your luck to thank for it. I like you well enough; and you have made a great success for a man of your beginnings; but you have no more morality than there is in that decanter of claret. Don't take offence, Sir Francis. The day I find you, or any other man, committing a crime of which no alteration in my circumstances or temperament could have rendered me capable, that day I shall throw up my profession and become a journeyman evangelist. We have always been on friendly terms, and I shall never take advantage of facts about you that have come to my knowledge; but . . . well, are you determined to be indignant?"

"Damme, sir, you have insulted me in your own house; I——"

"Don't be a fool, Bendibow," interrupted the other coldly. "You have come here to ask my advice, and perhaps my assistance. You can have both, within certain limits; but on condition that you don't require me to shut my eyes to your character. Technically speaking, I have insulted you; and you may resent it if you like. But as a man of the world, you may remember that I have not spoken in the presence of witnesses; and that if you were blameless, the insult would recoil on myself. Take time to think it over, and then do as best pleases you."

Sir Francis, however, whatever may have been his other failings, was not slow-witted; and he had already taken his attitude. "You have a damned disagreeable way of putting things, Fillmore," he said; "you ought to know that something more than logic is necessary to make social intercourse agreeable. It is not so much what you say, as your manner of saying it, that got the better of my temper for a moment. I'm not going to quarrel with you for not believing me to be a saint; you may distrust my financial discretion, if you like; but you can't expect me to be interested in hearing your reasons. Let me try

the other claret. I have made my mistakes, and I've repented of them, I hope. No man, unless he's a fool, gossips about his mistakes—why should he? Do you mean to say that I can't consult you on a matter that annoys me, without your raking up all my follies of the last five-and-twenty years?"

"My intention was not to alter our relations but to define them," Fillmore replied. "As we stand now, we are not likely to misconceive each other. What is this annoyance?"

"It comes from one of my follies that you've not been at the pains to remember. But I suppose you know that when Grantley absconded, he left a daughter behind him, whom I adopted; and that ten years ago she married and left England."

Fillmore nodded.

"She came back a week or two ago," continued the baronet; "and she acted a little scene at my expense in my office. It was at my expense in more ways than one. She is a devilish clever woman. She had a grudge against me for not having given her the dowry she wanted at the time of her marriage; and . . . well, the upshot of it was, that I compounded with her for some thousands of pounds. It was confoundedly inconvenient at the time, too; and after all, instead of

banking with us, as she had given us to understand she would, the little rascal has gone to Child's. Her husband left her a very pretty fortune. There's not a widow in London better off or better-looking than she is."

"She means to settle here?"

"She does. And I would give a good deal if she had settled in New Zealand instead!"

"From what you have said," observed Fillmore, after a pause, "I infer that the lady knows something to your discredit."

"Thank you! It's not what she knows, but what she may come to know—at least, something might happen which might be very annoying. Hang it, Fillmore, can't you keep your inferences to yourself? I'm not in the dock—I'm at your table!"

"If I am to understand your story, either you must tell it, or I must guess it."

"I am telling it, as fast as I can use my tongue," returned Sir Francis, who was beginning to be demoralised by the lawyer's imperturbable high-handedness. "To hear you, one would suppose that I was talking in riddles."

"It may be my obtuseness; but I cannot see why the fact that a good-looking woman, who is

your niece and adopted daughter, chooses to live in London, should in itself cause you annoyance."

"If you will do me the favour to listen to me for a moment, I may be able to explain it. This niece and adopted daughter of mine is . . . is not my own daughter, of course."

"Does anyone believe that she is?—The lady herself, for example?"

"If she did, I should not be inconvenienced in the way I am. Had I foreseen all contingencies, I should have brought her up in the belief that she was my own daughter. As far as giving her every advantage and indulgence that was in my power is concerned, no daughter of my own could have been treated differently. But though I omitted to disguise from her the fact that she was not my own flesh and blood, I was careful never to enlarge upon the misfortunes of her actual parentage. I never spoke to her about Charles Grantley. Whatever she my have learnt about him did not come from me. I have always discouraged all allusion to him, in fact; but a girl's curiosity will be gratified even to her own hurt; and Perdita has more than once given me to understand that she knew her father's name, if not his history." Here Sir Thomas paused, to pour himself out a glass of claret.

"Since the man is dead," said Fillmore, "and

his reputation not of the brightest, her knowing about him can injure no one but herself."

"Let us put a case," said the baronet, narrowing his eyes and turning his face towards the ceiling. "Let us suppose she were to say to herself, 'My father disappeared so many years ago, a fugitive from justice. Some time after, report came of his death. Now, there may be true reports, and there may be false reports. Has this report had such confirmation as to put its truth beyond all possibility of question? It has not. It is, therefore, within the range of possibility that it may be false. Now, whose interest would it be that a false report of that kind should be circulated! Who, and who only, would benefit by it? Who would be relieved by it from an imminent and incessant peril? Whom would its belief enable to begin a new career, unhampered by the delinquencies of his past?—and to do this, perhaps, in the very spot where those former delinquencies had been committed? What——'"

"You mean to imply," interposed Fillmore, "that your adopted daughter believes her father to be living in London?"

"Not so fast, not so fast, my friend! So far as I am aware, the idea has not entered into her mind I am speaking of possibilities."

Fillmore gazed at his guest several moments in silence. At length he said, "I will adopt the hypothetical vein, since you prefer it. We will suppose that Grantley is alive, and in London, and that his daughter finds it out; and seeks or grants an interview with him. What would be the nature of the inconvenience that would cause you?"

"But surely, my dear Fillmore," cried the baronet, "you cannot fail to see how awkwardly I should be placed! The man, of course, would have some plausible story or other to tell her. She would believe him, and would plead his cause with me. What could I do? To deliver him up to justice would be as much of a hardship and more of a disgrace to me than to him: not speak of the extremely painful position in which it would place her. Matters would be raked up which were far better left in merciful oblivion. Were I, on the other hand, to allow him to establish himself amongst us, under the assumed name which he would probably have adopted, he would presume upon my tolerance, and become an impracticable nuisance. Having once accepted him, I should never afterwards be able to rid myself of him: he would make himself an actual incubus. The thing would be unendurable either way."

"It will simplify this affair, Bendibow," said the lawyer slowly, "if you inform me whether Charles Grantley is in London, or not."

Sir Francis, who looked a good deal flushed and over-wrought, tossed off another glass of wine by way of tranquillising his nerves, and said, "Of course, my dear fellow, I might confide in your discretion. You understand my dilemma . . . . my object is to prevent——"

"Come, Bendibow; answer my question, or let us change the subject."

For a moment it seemed probable that the baronet would give vent to the spleen which was doubtless grilling within him; but the moment passed, and he answered rather sullenly, "'Tis not likely that I should have been at the pains to prolong the interview, had I not good reason to believe that he is in this neighbourhood. In fact, the fellow had the audacity to call on me at the bank the other day, and introduce himself under the name of Grant."

"Is he in needy circumstances?"

"No—not so far as I know," said Sir Francis, wiping his face with his handkerchief. "In fact, now I think of it, the clerk gave me to understand that he had deposited a certain sum in the bank."

"Did he express an intention of visiting his daughter?"

"He inquired about her. Of course I did not inform him of her whereabouts; I was but an hour before made acquainted with them myself. The assurance of the man passes belief."

"It is certainly remarkable, if there is nothing to be added to your account of the events that led to his disappearance. What do you wish me to do?" As the baronet hesitated to reply, the other continued, "Shall I speak with the man, and threaten him with the severity of the law unless he departs?"

"No, no—that won't do at all!" exclaimed Sir Francis with emphasis. "No use saying anything to him; he knows very well that I don't choose to have any scandal; and if he would keep himself quiet, and not attempt to renew any of his former ties or associations, he might go to the devil, for me. I forgave him twenty years ago, on condition that he would take himself off; and I would forgive him now for not keeping to the letter of his agreement, provided he would observe the spirit of it. No, no—it's the Marquise—it's Perdita, whom we must approach. You can manage her better than I; she won't suspect you. You must sound her carefully; she's a doocid clever

woman, but you can do it if any man can. If you can induce her to change her residence to some other country, so much the better. Find out what she knows and thinks about this father of hers; if the opportunity offers, paint the devil in all his ugliness. At any cost, put all possible barriers in the way of their meeting. That's the main thing. No use my giving you instructions; you'll know what to do when you see her, and find out the sort of woman she is. Shall depend on you, my dear Fillmore—your sagacity and friendship and all that. You know what I mean. Use your own judgment. Damme, I can trust a friend!"

"I will think it over, and speak to you again on the subject in a day or two," said Fillmore, who perceived that the claret had not improved the baronet's perspicacity or discretion. Moreover, the subject appeared to him to demand more than ordinary reflection. Long after Sir Francis had been bundled into his carriage and sent home, the lawyer sat with folded arms and his chin in his hand, examining the topic of the evening in many lights, and from various points of view.

"Never knew an honest man so shy of the malefactor who had swindled him," he muttered to himself when he went to bed.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. GRANT, although he had doubtless been the victim of some bitter experiences, had possessed enough native generosity and simplicity not to have become embittered by them. His youth had known what it is to love, and now his old age was able to take an interest in the loves of others. He had accordingly observed with a great deal of interest the contact of the two young characters with whom chance had associated him; and pleased himself with the notion that they might become man and wife. Being a sagacious old gentleman, however, as well as a benevolent one, he had abstained from making any direct communication of his hopes to the parties most concerned, or even to Mrs. Lockhart. He was well aware that human beings, especially while they are under thirty, object to being guided, even though their guide lead them whither they themselves would go. He rather sought to fathom their peculiarities of character, in order that he might, without their suspecting it, incline them

to his purpose. At the first view, the enterprise did not appear a very hopeful one. Beyond that Marion and Philip had ample opportunities of becoming acquainted with each other, and were of an age to marry, circumstances seemed rather against the match. They were both poor: Marion could not well be more so, and Philip, save for such income as his poetry might bring him, had no more than enough for his own support. They could scarcely be said to belong to the same class in life, and their outward associations and sympathies were far from being identical. What was more serious than all this, however, they were, as a general thing, more inclined to quarrel than to agree. There was a satirical vein in both of them, and neither of them was old enough to forbear giving utterance to a keen remark that happened to come into their minds. In matters affecting the conduct of life, Philip assumed a cynical tone, which Marion never failed to impeach as unworthy and contemptible. There was much subtlety and intricacy in both their characters, but Philip was an inveterate self-analyst, and prone to make the most of his contradictions, while Marion took but a faint interest in herself, and was never inclined to make herself the subject of discussion; she scouted all cut-ant-dried rules

of behaviour, and was far more genuinely reserved, and therefore more abstruse a problem, than Philip. She was almost savagely independent; and Philip, partly because she really put his own independence in jeopardy, attempted to wear a condescending manner towards her, which she altogether resented and laughed to scorn. On the other hand, she was continually making unexpected attacks upon his self-esteem, and exposing his Machiavelism, in a manner that he found it difficult to sustain with equanimity; and the apprehension of these onslaughts diminished his ability to show himself in his truer and more amiable colours. Thus, in one way or another, there was always a surface contention going on between them. Whether the hostility went deeper than the surface it was not easy to decide. No doubt each appreciated the good qualities that the other possessed, as abstract good qualities; but that would not prevent their objecting to the fashion in which the good qualities were called into play. It is not so much what a person is, as how he is it, that determines the opinion his fellows have of him. Marion, for example, felt herself under deep and permanent obligation to Philip for his conduct in relation to Major Lockhart; and she must have perceived that such an act was worth

much more as an indication of character than intrinsically. But had she been questioned on this point, she would probably have said that Mr. Lancaster would be more agreeable if all his acts were as little agreeable as himself. It is beneath the intelligence of any woman—certainly of any young woman—to like a man merely because, upon logical, demonstrative, or syllogistic grounds, he deserves it. She is more likely to make his desert a point against him.

Such were some of the obstacles in the way of Mr. Grant's scheme; and the fact that Philip was handsome and high-bred would have but small weight in determining the choice of a girl like Marion. Philip, on the contrary, was of a fastidious and Aristarchian turn that would incline him to look for visible and palpable charms and graces, as well as mental and moral ones, in the woman of his heart. Now, Marion, as has already been intimated, was by no means pre-eminently beautiful; and it was not among her notions of duty to make the most of such attractions as she had. She was tall, and rather largely made, with a figure finely developed, not graceful in its movements. Her face had nobility and intelligence, but not comeliness; she was an example of how a woman may have all the elements of good looks

except the finishing touches, and yet not appear good-looking. Some imperfection of health, not uncommon to girls of her age and temperament, had impaired the smoothness of her complexion; and she had overtaxed her grey eyes by reading at night in bed. She often fell into taciturn moods, when she would hardly speak for days together; at other times talk rapidly and at some length; and when, as rarely happened, she was sensible of affection and sympathy, she could be deliciously and fancifully voluble, revealing a rich and tender spirit, original, observant, and keen. But on the whole, she was more prone to act than to speak; attached importance rather to what others did than to what they said; and could express more, and more subtle things, by deeds than by words. She had a fiery and almost wild temper, but it was never ungenerous or underhand; and she was sensitively and unreasonably proud. There was an almost insane streak in her, showing itself in strange freaks and escapades; she would laugh when she might have wept; and wept but seldom, and then in secret, and obstructedly or revengefully. She enjoyed the unusual aspects of nature and things, and was amused where other women would tremble. There was a vein of mischief in her; but this belonged to the brighter side of her character, and

was arch and playful. What she needed, in order to the full health of her body and mind, was more deep and broad mental and moral occupation; what declared itself as ill-health being but the effect of unemployed energy reacting upon itself. Her worst faults were perhaps an alert and intractable jealousy, and a readiness perversely to suspect others of insincerity and meanness towards herself. But the latter of these errors was caused by her low opinion of her personal deserts; and the former by her not ignoble zeal for the integrity of honourable and pure emotions, which, though harboured by her, belonged not to her individually, but were to the credit of our general human nature.

That Mr. Grant did not lose heart in face of the difficulties against which he had pitted himself, showed either that he possessed great temerity, or that he could see farther than most people into millstones. It was not so much his aim, at first, to force the young people into each other's society, as to talk to each about the other, and about love and marriage; not obtruding his own views, but eliciting and criticising theirs. He was a pleasant man to talk with, for he made his interlocutor talkative; and the topics upon which he chiefly dwelt were such as seldom fail to interest any man or woman whose heart has not been mis-

used—I will not say by others, or by the world, but—by the owner of it. To hear him, you would have thought that Mr. Grant, so far from desiring to impart information or understanding, was in search thereof, and needed support at every step. For one who had so much an air of cultivation and refinement, he was an amazingly unenlightened old gentleman.

"I remember, when I was a young fellow," he said one day to Marion, "I held an opinion which was very unfashionable. Indeed, for the matter of that, a good many of my opinions were unfashionable. Since then, I have come to reconsider not a few of them. One's point of view changes as one moves on. Perhaps the notion to which I refer was erroneous, as well as the others."

"You have not told me what it was," said Marion.

"I mean, whether or not it is prudent and sensible to marry for love?"

"I don't think love is a thing about which one ought to be prudent. Because prudence is to be careful not to put yourself to some inconvenience; and love outweighs all the inconveniences in the world . . . I should think."

"Ay; but suppose that, after a while, all the

love should be gone, and only the inconvenience left? Then I should wish I had been prudent, shouldn't I?"

"But a real love never can be gone. It is all there is of you. It must last as long as you do. And when you are gone, prudence is no matter."

"I would agree with you, my dear, were it possible for us to know love when we see him. I fear there is a great deal of evidence that we do not do that. And though it takes only one person to make that mistake, not all the world can set it right again."

"Like Humpty-Dumpty," said Marion, with a laugh. "But I don't think there can be any mistake about the love we feel. 'Tis like being in the sunshine; we don't mistake sunshine for moonlight, or starlight, or for all the lamps and candles that ever burned."

"Ah! then you admit that we may be mistaken in the object for which our love is felt? And that comes to the same thing after all."

"But I don't say that; I'm not sure of that," said Marion thoughtfully, and looking somewhat troubled. "Besides, even if you loved . . . some one who did not love you, or was not worthy of your love—still, you know, you would have loved.

You could afford to be unhappy after that! If I were a common pebble, and some enchanter transformed me into a diamond, he might crush me afterwards; I should have been all I could be."

Mr. Grant sighed. "You young folk know how to be eloquent," said he. "And you may be right, my dear—you may be right. I should like to think so. I suppose everyone is not born with the power of loving; but, for those who are, what you say may be true. And possibly Providence may so order things—I am an old-fashioned fellow, you see, and believe in Providence—that those who can truly love are never ignobly disappointed. They will have griefs, no doubt—for it would be an empty world that was without those—but not ignoble ones. There may be something purifying and divine in a real love, that makes it like an angel before whose face all that is base and paltry flees away." After saying this, Mr. Grant was silent for a little while; and Marion, glancing at his face, fancied that he was thinking of some vanished love of his own, and she would have asked him about it, but could not find words to do it in. Presently he looked round at her, and said, with a smile:

"You, at any rate, have a right to your be-

lief, my dear. It comes to you by inheritance. Your mother, I am sure, made a love-match?"

"Oh, yes! But mamma was born for such things—to love and be loved, I mean. I sometimes think, though, she would not have loved my father so much, if she had not first met Mr. Tom Grantley. She imagined she was in love with him, you know: just for a little while; and he must have been a grand man; he made her heart wake up—he made her know what love was, without making her really love him. So, when she met father, she knew how to give herself to him. Wouldn't it have been strange if she had married Mr. Grantley! But she would not have been happy. How strange if she had married him! I could not bear to have any other father but my own father: I shall never care for anyone as I did for him."

"Indeed, it would have been strange if she had married Mr. Grantley," returned the old gentleman musingly. "But, as you say, 'tis doubtless better as it is. In my life, many things have happened that I would gladly have averted, or altered: but looking back on them now, I can see how they may have been for the best. For instance, I am very fond of you, my dear Marion —you won't mind me saying this, will you?—and

I might wish that I had some substantial right to be fond of you, and to expect you to be fond of me: that you might have been my niece or daughter, or my young sister—my step-sister, let us say. But, after all, I would have nothing altered; and I dare say you will give me, out of free generosity, as much affection as if you were my kinswoman."

"Oh, at least as much," said Marion, smiling. "And I might like you even more than I do if there were some good reason why I should not like you so much."

"I doubt if I have audacity enough to take you at your word . . . and yet, I don't know! I might devise some plot against you which you would only discover after my death; as people leave hampering legacies to their survivors, who are then obliged to grin and bear it. Will you like me better on the mere chance of such a calamity?"

"It is very hard to forgive benefits; and I'm afraid that is the only sort of calamity you will bring down upon me."

"But, don't you think there is a point at which independence becomes selfishness?"

"I think it is better to run that risk than the other. It would be for me, I am sure. I don't believe in myself enough to venture on making a

milliner's block of myself—all my value to be in the fine things that are hung on me. Mamma is always hoping I may get married—she can't understand that all women are not created marriageable, as she was—and wants me to 'make the most of my advantages,' as she calls it. As if I wouldn't take more pains to appear disagreeable to a man who wanted to marry me than to anyone else!"

"You remind me of something Philip Lancaster said the other day. We were speaking of the extraordinary marriages one hears of—the most unlikely people falling in love with each other—and he made the remark that the people best worth knowing were those who refused to be known—or something of that kind; and that probably, in the case of a man marrying a woman—or *vice versâ*—of whom it is asked, 'What on earth could he see in her?' the truth is, he sees in her what is reserved only for the eyes of love to discern—something too rare and precious to reveal itself at any less magic touch than love's. It struck me as a good saying; because it rebukes surface judgments of human nature, and developes the symbol of the diamond, which is the most beautiful of all gems, and therefore the least accessible."

"I should have expected Mr. Lancaster to say

that the diamond is the least accessible, and therefore the most beautiful—in the finder's opinion: that is the way he would have put it had he been talking to me."

"As to that," replied Mr. Grant, with a smile, "Lancaster, in his dealings with you, reminds me of a young officer I once saw carrying despatches in a battle across the line of fire. In his anxiety to show that the imminent peril he was in, did not in the least frighten him, he put on such an affected swagger—he was naturally a very modest and unpretentious young fellow—that his most intimate friend would hardly have recognised him. Now, I apprehend that my friend Lancaster's native simplicity is disguised by a like effort to appear indifferent to your sharp-shooting. 'Tis hardly fair, Marion. It is one thing to hide the graces of one's own mind and heart; but to force another to disfigure his is less justifiable, methinks!"

"Mr. Lancaster would be amused at the idea of my being unjust to him," said Marion, reddening and laughing. "He'd be expecting me to criticise the sun at noonday next!"

"There is a difference betwixt appreciating one's self, and being self-conceited," replied Mr. Grant. "Lancaster is at the age when a man sees himself rather as a reflection of humanity in general,

than as an individual. He has much insight; he detects a great number of traits and qualities in people with whom he comes in contact: and whatever he has the sympathy to detect in others, he fancies he possesses himself. 'Tis a natural misconception; he lacks the experience that will hereafter enable him to distinguish one's ownership of it. The older we grow, the more we find the limits of character contract; we actually become but a small fraction of what we see and understand. And then, it may be, a young man receives a sharper impression from the evil that is in the world than from the good; and that may be the reason why our friend Philip sometimes refers so darkly and ominously to his moral condition. 'Tis not his own wickedness that oppresses him, but that which he has divined in the capacities of human nature. An old fellow like me prefers to look at the brighter side of mankind; and therefore, perhaps, ceases to take so much interest in himself."

"It may be all true—I suppose it is," said Marion, with a great air of indifference. "But Mr. Lancaster probably won't need my appreciation so long as he is not tired of his own."

"Ah, my child," the old gentleman said, with more gravity than he had yet used, "we are all

foolish and feeble creatures, and 'tis pathetic how we strive—clumsily and mistakenly often, God knows!—to appear wise and strong in one another's sight. If you would take my word for it I would tell you our saddest regret at the close of life is that we have been less forbearing and helpful to our fellows than we might have been. And I would have you believe too, that to do some good is much easier than it seems. It is as easy as to be ironical and self-sufficient. Here is a young man's soul passing your way on its long journey, not knowing how to ask your womanly sympathy and influence, but much in need of them nevertheless. Perhaps you might say a word or do a deed to him that would make an eternal difference in the path he takes and the goal he reaches. To underrate your power is to wrong both yourself and him. For we know—do we not, my dear?—that the source whence good comes is not in ourselves."

Marion's face had grown intensely expressive while Mr. Grant was speaking; her cheeks and forehead flushed, her eyes showed disquietude, and she moved her hand restlessly. Presently she exclaimed, "It is not as you suppose, sir. I don't feel unkindly to Mr. Lancaster—he was kind to us before he knew us. But it is not my place . . .

I am a girl . . . he would not thank me. There is someone else—he knows Perdita Desmoines; I cannot interfere." She stood up and moved, as if she intended to leave the room.

Mr. Grant rose and took her hand. "I know of his acquaintance with that lady," he said; "but I think Philip is neither so young nor so old as you would imply. And the truth is, Marion, you have won my heart, and so has he; and my conscience never feels quite at ease until I have made my friends friends of each other. What else does Providence give them to me for?"

"For their own good, I should imagine," replied Marion, with a smile.

"Ay—the good I may be the means of their doing each other."

She shook her head and laughed. "Though, to be sure," she added, "'twould be scarce worth while to count the good they are like to do you."

"I am too far on in years to begin to count the good you have done me, my dear," said the old gentleman. And then, as they were at the door, he opened it for her, and she passed out. After closing it again, Mr. Grant took out his snuff-box and helped himself to a pinch with an air of much quiet contentment.

CHAPTER XIV.

JUNE, in England, sometimes combines the tender afternoon of spring with the dawning beauty of summer. There is joyful potency in the sunshine, but no white colourless glare; it seems to proceed almost as much from the face of the earth as from the sun. The air, both in light and in shadow, is of an even warmth—the happy medium between heat and cold—which, like perfect health, exhilarates us with so much subtlety that we are hardly aware of it until it is no more. Nature, who has no memory, triumphs over our weary hearts by telling over once more the sweet story, repeated a myriad times; and with such youthful zest as half to beguile us into the belief that it is new indeed. So, too, the infant man begins the heavy journey whose end we know too well, unshadowed by the gloom of our experience, shielded from our dreary sophistries by the baby wisdom brought from Heaven, which we can never learn. We know how soon he must lose that shield of light; yet we prolong for him, if we may, the heavenly period.

For our human life is a valley, the gloom of whose depths would be too terrible to endure, did we not believe that its limits, on either side, bordered on the sky.

Mr. Grant was, perhaps, peculiarly appreciative of the charm of this English season, because he had been so long exiled to the torrid damps of India. One morning, accordingly, when the family were seated round the breakfast-table with the fresh air and sunshine streaming through the open window, he pulled out of his fob the large old-fashioned gold watch which he always carried, and, having consulted it, said—

"'Tis now eight o'clock, Mrs. Lockhart. Shall you be ready in an hour?"

To which Mrs. Lockhart, who had all that morning worn upon her gentle countenance an expression of mysterious presage, alien to her customary aspect of guileless amenity, replied, mantling with a smile, "Quite ready, Mr. Grant."

"At nine o'clock, then, we will set out. Marion, get on your riding-habit; you and Mr. Lancaster must accompany us on horseback."

Philip and Marion looked inquiringly at each other, and then at their elders; and Philip said, "Is this another Popish plot?"

"Nothing so unsubstantial," Mr. Grant replied.

"Mrs. Lockhart and I are going to drive to Richmond Hill, and Marion and you are to escort us. The carriage and the horses will be at the door an hour hence. So—no cookery and no poetry in this house to-day!"

Marion went round to her mother and kissed her cheek. "But Mr. Grant is having a bad effect on you, mamma," she said. "You never kept a secret from me before!"

By nine o'clock everything and everybody were ready. Philip, booted and spurred, and with a feather in his steeple-crowned hat, was as handsome as one of the heroes of his own poems, who indeed, all more or less resembled him; and Marion had never looked so well as in her dark blue riding-habit. As for Mrs. Lockhart and Mr. Grant, they were at least as youthful as any of the party; and the June morning glorified them all. The two elder people took their seats in the carriage; Philip helped Marion into her saddle, and then leaped into his own; the coachman gathered up his reins, and they started off. In a few minutes they were moving along the broad highway towards Kew Bridge, Marion and Philip riding side by side in advance. The tall elms shook green shadows from their rustling leaves, interspersed with sunbeams and sweet bird-voices;

veils of thinnest cloud softened the tender horizon, and drew in tranquil arcs across the higher blue. A westerly breeze, coming from the coolness where the dawn was still beginning, breathed past their faces and sent freshness to their hearts. The horses shook their heads and stretched their limbs, and slanted forward anticipative ears. Marion's cheeks were red, and her eyes sparkled.

"I wish Richmond Hill were t'other side the world," she said, "and we to ride there!"

"I would ride with you as far as that, and then home the other way," said Philip.

"We should lose our road, perhaps."

"No matter, if we did not lose each other."

"Could you write poetry on horseback?"

"'Tis better to ride through a poem than to write one."

"Would this poem be blank verse or rhyme?"

"Rhyme!" cried Philip.

"Why?"

"Because that poem should make Marion rhyme with Philip."

"Yes—when it is written!"

"I would rather be the author of that poem than of any other."

Marion laughed. "You would find it very poor prose when it was done."

"It would turn all my prose into poetry, if I might hope even to begin it. Marion——"

She reined in her horse. "We are going too fast and too far," she said gravely. "The carriage is almost out of sight."

"But your mother will trust you with me," said Philip, looking at her.

"You do not know that; nor whether I care to be trusted."

"Ah! that is what I fear," said Philip, biting his lip. "You prefer to ride alone; I don't!"

"You're not accustomed to it, perhaps?"

"I have been alone all my life!"

Marion laughed again. "I thought the Marquise Desmoines was a horsewoman," she said.

Philip blushed; and, the carriage having by this time come up, the conversation was carried no further.

But it was impossible to be dispirited on a day like this. The deep smile of a summer morning, though it may seem to mock the dreariness of age, is generally found contagious by youth. The mind must be powerfully preoccupied that can turn its eyes inward, when such a throng of outward loveliness invites it. As the party approached the ridge, a narrow and humpbacked structure, which made up in picturesqueness

what it lacked in convenience, the broad reaches of the river came into view, widening down on the left towards distant London, and, on the right, curving round the wooded shores of Kew. The stream echoed with inward tones the blue aloft, varying its clear serenity with a hundred frets and trills of sparkling light. Many boats plied to and fro, oared by the jolly young watermen who dreamt not of railways and steam-launches. There were voices of merrymakers, laughter, and calling, after the British fashion, all taking so well the colour of the scene as to appear to be its natural utterance; though when, with a finer ear, you caught the singing of the birds, that seemed the natural utterance too. Crossing the bridge, and winding past Kew Green, they began to behold, at a distance of a mile or so, the pleasant town of Richmond grouped betwixt the river and the hill. Leaving a venerable hostelry on the right, and turning sharply westwards, carriage and horses trundled and tramped conspicuous along the high shouldered street; butcher-boys and loafers turned to stare; shopkeepers bowed in their doorways, rubbing superserviceable hands, and smirking invitations; a post-boy, standing at the door of the Castle Inn with a pot of ale in his hand, emptied it to Marion's health; while the neat bar-maid who

had fetched it for him paused on the threshold with the corner of her apron to her lips, and giggled and reddened at handsome Philip's nod. Anon they breasted the hill, whose sudden steepness made the horses bob their heads and dig their iron toes sharply into the road. As they mounted to higher air, so did the arc of the horizon seem to mount with them, and the wide levels of rich country lying between retired from verdurous green to remote blue, divided by the lazy curves of glancing Thames. It is the most cultivated prospect in the world, and second to none in wealth and variety of historical association. It gives range and breathing-room to the spirits; it has endless comely charm, but it is not inspiring. It is redolent of the humdrum flatness of respectable and prosperous mediocrity. The trees look like smug green cauliflowers; and the blue of the distance seems artificial.

"I am sure there can be nothing so lovely as that in India, Mr. Grant," said Mrs. Lockhart.

"A bare rock would be lovelier than India to me if it bore the name of England," he replied. "I thank God that I shall die, after all, within hail of so sweet a plain as that."

"No!" said Marion, in a low, disturbed voice. Her horse was standing close to that side of the

carriage on which Mr. Grant sat, and the word was audible only to him. He looked round at her and added with a smile, "In the fulness of time."

The coachman began to point out the points of interest: "That's Twickenham Church, ma'am. Mr. Pope's willa is a bid furder down. Yonder's Mr. Orace Walpole's place. Of a clear day, sir, you may see Winser Cassel, twenty mile off. Hepsom will be that-away, sir."

"What do you think of it?" Philip asked Marion.

"It has a homely look," she answered; "home-like, I mean."

"Yes: we might ride round the world, and not find a better home than that," said he, pointing down the declivity to a house that stood by the margin of the river, on a smooth green lawn overshadowed by stately elms.

"Or a worse one, maybe!" she returned coldly. But the next moment she glanced at him with a smile that was not so cold.

The party moved on again, and at the end of a little more climbing reached the famous inn, which, at that epoch, was a much less grandiloquent structure than it is now, and infinitely more humane towards its guests. The riders

dismounted, the horses were led to the stable; and Mr. Grant, having had a confidential consultation with the host and the head-waiter, proposed to his friends a ramble in the park. So off they all went, at first in a group; but after a while Mrs. Lockhart wished to sit down on a bench that was wedged between two oaks of mighty girth; and as Mr. Grant seemed equally inclined to repose, Philip presently drew Marion away across the glade. It dipped through a fern-brake, and then sloped upwards again to a grove of solemn oaks, each one of which might have afforded house-room to a whole family of dryads.

"I remember this grove," Philip remarked; "I was here long ago—nearly twenty years. I was an Eton boy then. It has changed very little."

"Less than you have."

"I sometimes doubt whether I am much changed either. What is it changes a man? His body grows, and he fills his memory with good and bad. But only so much of what he learns stays with him as naturally belongs to him; the knowledge he gains is only the confirmation of what he knew before. A word is not changed by magnifying it."

"But if you put in another syllable?——"

"Yes, then it becomes different: either more or less than it was before, or, maybe, nonsense. But it is not learning that can put a new syllable into a man."

"What does, then?"

Philip did not immediately reply; but by-and-by he said, "I believe Providence meant our brains only to show us what fools we are. At least, that's the most mine have done for me. The more fuel we put into it, and the more light it gives out, the more clearly does it reveal to us our smallness and poverty."

"Perhaps—if we turn the light against ourselves. But clever people like you generally prefer to throw light upon the smallness and poverty of others."

Again Philip paused for several moments; then he said suddenly, his eyes darkening, "By God, were I to be tried for my life, I would not choose you for my judge!"

They were sitting together on the roots of one of the oaks. Marion turned her head slowly and encountered Philip's look. She put out her hand and touched his, saying, "Forgive me."

He grasped her hand and held it. At first she made a movement as if to withdraw it; but meeting his eyes again, she let it remain. She

looked away; a long breath, intermittently drawn, filled her bosom. The contact of her hand, sensitive and alive, was more significant than a kiss to Philip. He did not venture to move or to speak; thoughts flew quickly through his mind—thoughts that he could not analyse; but they were born of such emotions as joy, eagerness, self-distrust, the desire to be nobler and better than he had ever been: a feeling of tender pathos. A voice in his heart kept repeating "Marion! Marion! Marion!" with a sense that everything womanly and sacred was implied in that name. He felt, also, that a sort of accident had brought him nearer to her than he had as yet a right to come; that he mu t wait, and give her time.

They got up, at last, by a mutual impulse, after how long a time they knew not. They had spoken no words. They looked at each other for a moment, and each beheld in the other something that had not been visible before: there was a certain surprise and softness in the look. The touch of the hands was over; but they seemed to be encircled by a secret sympathy that sweetly secluded them from all foreign approach. The nearness was spiritual, and demanded a degree of physical severance. They

moved along, with a space between them, but intimately conscious of each other.

Presently Philip said, "I am changed now; but, you see, it was not memory or knowledge that changed me."

"Do you like the change?" she asked.

"I don't like to think how much time I have wasted without changing."

"Perhaps, since it pleases you so well, you'll want to change again?"

"I'm afraid you will never change!" he returned, with a cadence of half-humorous expostulation. "There'll be no more change in me this side death."

As he spoke he looked towards her; she was walking with eyes downcast, a doubtful smile coming and going about her lips. About a hundred yards beyond, in the line of his glance, a man and a woman on horseback passed rapidly across an opening between two groups of trees. Just before they swept out of sight the woman turned her face in Philip's direction, and immediately made a gesture with her right hand. Whether it were a signal of recognition, or whether it had no reference to him, Philip could not decide. A painful sensation passed through his mind; but he was glad that the episode had

escaped Marion's notice. Soon after, they rejoined Mrs. Lockhart and Mr. Grant; and Marion seemed to be relieved to be once more, as it were, under their protection. The importunity of an ungauged and unfamiliar joy may affect the heart like a danger.

For the rest of the day, accordingly, the four remained together, and, save for some slight intermittent anxiety on Philip's part, they were all as happy as human beings are apt to be. Marion and Philip said very little to each other, and that of the most conventional description; but an inward smile, that seldom ventured beyond the eyes, illuminated both of them. Meanwhile, Mrs. Lockhart certainly, and Mr. Grant apparently, were most comfortably unconscious of anything exceptional having taken place. The serene geniality of the weather was perfectly reflected in the sentiments of those who enjoyed it. When the air of the hill had made them remember that something was to be done at the inn, they betook themselves thither, and were shown into a western room, whose open window gave upon the famous prospect. Here a table was set out and dinner served by a profoundly respectable and unexceptionable waiter, who had the air of having spent his previous life in perfecting himself for this occasion

They had a couple of bottles of very delicate Lafitte; and always, before raising his glass to his lips, Philip lifted his eyes, and quaffed an instant's sweet intelligence from Marion's.

"How do you find the wine, Lancaster?" Mr. Grant asked.

"I wish I might never drink any other," was his reply.

"It is very good, but it goes to my head," remarked Mrs. Lockhart.

"It goes to my heart," said Philip.

"All the same, you may feel the worse for it to-morrow morning," said Marion, with one of her short laughs.

"A heart-ache instead of a head-ache!" smiled Mr. Grant.

"Heart-ache would come only from being denied it," Philip rejoined.

"I must try and get you some of it to drink at home," said guileless Mrs. Lockhart.

"'Tis Lafitte—you may get it anywhere," put in Marion. As she spoke she pushed back her chair from the table, adding, "Come mamma, we have had enough; let us go out on the terrace," So she triumphed over Philip in having the last word.

The afternoon was mellowing towards even-

ing by the time the unexceptionable waiter announced that the carriage and horses were waiting. As Philip helped Marion to her seat he said:

"After all, it is not so long a ride round the world, is it?"

She answered: "I don't know. We are not got home yet, remember."

Going down the hill, they halted at the spot whence they had first caught the view on ascending, to take a farewell look at it. A noise of hoofs following down the road above caused Philip to look around, and he saw approaching the same lady and gentleman whom he had caught a glimpse of in the park that morning. The blood flew to his face, and he set his teeth against his lips.

The lady, riding up, saluted him with her whip, exclaiming laughingly, "Philip Lancaster, after all! You naughty boy—then it *was* you I saw coming out of the grove, and you would not answer my greeting!"

"Indeed!" was all Philip found to reply.

She reined her horse and extended her hand to him. "Indeed! Yes. But you were always so! . . . well, I forgive you because of your poetry." Here she turned her eyes, which were very bright and beautiful, upon the occupants of the carriage. "Surely I have known this lady?" she murmured.

"Madame, are you not Mrs. Lockhart? Oh—then this—yes, this must be Marion!" She clapped her hands together with a sort of childlike gaiety. "And you have all forgotten me! You have forgotten Perdita Bendibow!"

Hereupon ensued a sociable turmoil—giving of hands—presentation of Mr. Grant—and of Perdita's cavalier, who was no other than Mr. Tom Bendibow, the hero of the coach-upsetting exploit. But the chief turmoil was in Philip's mind. Everything passed before his eyes like a dream—and an extremely uncongenial one. Once or twice he glanced at Marion; but she was not looking his way—she was laughing and chatting with the Marquise and Tom Bendibow alternately; there was vivid colour in her cheeks. Philip was also aware that the Marquise occasionally spoke to him, or at him, in very friendly and familiar terms. It was charming. And at last she said:

"There, I cannot stay—I am late; but you will come—mind! You have all promised. There will be no one but ourselves. Thursday—a week from this day—at six o'clock. Mr. Grant and all. You will not forget, Mr. Grant?"

"I shall not forget, madame," he said gravely and courteously.

"And you, ma chère," she continued, turning

to Marion; and then, playfully tapping Philip with her whip, "because then we shall be sure of him! Mrs. Lockhart, I have so much to talk to you of your dear husband . . . he saved my husband's life! . . . I must kiss you!" She forced her horse to the side of the carriage, and, bending low from the saddle, touched the old lady's cheek with her lovely lips. The next moment she was erect again. "Come, Tom!" she exclaimed, "we must gallop! Good-bye, all of you!" And down the hill they rode at speed.

"How charming and beautiful she is!" said Mrs. Lockhart, smiling with tears in her eyes. "She has made the day quite perfect."

"Yes, she appeared at the right moment," assented Marion lightly.

In one sense, certainly, Perdita could be said to have been the consummation of the holiday; but, even in a party of four, the same event may have widely different meanings.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. GRANT, like other men in whom a quiet demeanour is the result rather of experience than

of temperament, was very observant: and he had observed several things during and after the day of Richmond. It may be assumed that he had not planned that expedition without some anticipation that it might have results particularly affecting Philip and Marion; and up to the moment when the party were overtaken, on their way home, by the Marquise Desmoines, he had reason to think that his anticipations had not been deceived. Since that moment, however, a change had taken place. Philip had worn an aspect of gloomy dejection at variance with his customary bearing; and Marion's mood had been exaggerated and unequal; sometimes manifesting an over-accented gaiety, at other times relapsing abruptly and without apparent cause into depths of wayward perversity. This state of things continued without much modification for several days; it being further noticeable that the young people avoided private interviews, or at any rate did not have any: for, if Philip desired them, Marion had the means of balking his desire, In the presence of other persons, however, she seemed not averse from holding converse with him; but her speech on such occasions had a mocking and unconciliating ring about it; and Philip's replies were brief and unenterprising. Evidently, the pegs that made their music had

been set down awry. There had been some sweet melody for a while. Who was their Iago?

"What a very charming lady is the Marquise Desmoines," remarked Mr. Grant one day to Philip. "I have seldom seen a more lovely face or a more engaging manner."

"Yes," returned the young man, looking away, and drumming on the table with his fingers.

"It was easy to see that you and she were on the best of terms with each other," the old gentleman continued.

Philip folded his arms, and tapped on the floor with his foot.

"She seemed to take a great fancy to Marion," Mr. Grant went on. "They bid fair to become great friends. It would be an excellent thing for Marion, would it not?"

"Upon my word, sir, it's none of my business," exclaimed Philip, rather impatiently. "Miss Lockhart will choose her friends to please herself, I presume. If it were my place to offer her advice in the matter, it might be different. With your permission, I prefer not to discuss the subject."

"As you please, my dear Philip," replied Mr. Grant, composedly taking snuff. "For my own part, it appeared to me that the Marquise could

give Marion those social advantages and opportunities that she especially needs. This invitation to her soirée will probably be the precursor of others. By-the-by, you will be present, of course?"

"Yes, that is my intention," said Philip, after a pause; and his tone had something defiant or threatening in it, as if he meant not only to be present, but to do some deed of note when he got there.

The Marquise's party was, as she had intimated, strictly limited as to numbers. It was not her wish to begin her formal entertainments as yet; her bereavement was still too recent, and, moreover, her new house was not in order. She might, possibly, have contrived to get along without giving any party at all, just at present; but she was enough a woman of the world not always to demand logical behaviour of herself, any more than to expect it in other people. She wished to feel the atmosphere of the new society into which she was about to enter, and to compare it with that which she had left. It would be novel; it might or it might not be preferable. The Marquise might decide, upon this experiment, not to settle in London, after all. Straws may show how the wind blows. She had no one's pleasure or convenience to think of but her own. There was

not even the Marquis now, who, if he did not have things his own way, at all events had occasionally afforded her the gratification of having hers in spite of him; and whose demise she perhaps regretted as much on that account as on any other. For the lady was of a strong and valiant disposition, and wanted something more in life than abject assent, and yielding beds of down. She wanted resistance, almost defeat, in order to give zest to victory. She wanted a strong man to fight with. In her heart, she believed she was stronger than any man she was likely to come across; but there were men, no doubt, who might be dangerous and formidable enough to be temporarily interesting. What manner of man in other respects this champion might be, would matter little to the Marquise. Like most women of first-rate ability, she was at bottom a democrat: rank was her convenience, but she had no respect for it or belief in it. Had she detected, in a stevedore or a Hindoo, stuff that was not to be had elsewhere, she would have received and entertained him. Meanwhile, she was well content to put up with Philip Lancaster. There was stuff in him: there was perhaps something in his past relations with her which rendered their present mutual attitude more piquant; and then, there was that little bud of a romance which

the Marquise had surprised on Richmond Hill. Upon the whole, she was justified in giving her little party.

Sir Francis Bendibow was the first to arrive, bringing with him Merton Fillmore, whom he introduced as follows: "A man, my dear creature, whom I've long wished to make known to you. Most brilliant fellow in London; my personal friend, as well as the trusted adviser of the House." He added in her ear, "You know—Fillmore, son of old Cadwallader Fillmore . . . uncle the Honourable . . . and Constance, you know . . . married Lord Divorn . . . that's the man! make friends with each other."

"I think," said the Marquise, glancing at the lawyer as she gave him her hand, "that Mr. Fillmore is more accustomed to choose his friends than to be chosen."

This bit of impromptu criticism arrested Fillmore's attention. After a pause he said:

"My friends are my clients, and I don't choose them."

"I mean, you have not found it wise to be troubled with women. If I were a man, I might think as you do, but I should act otherwise. But then I should not be a barrister."

"I am a solicitor."

The Marquise laughed. "Men of real genius distinguish their professions—they are not distinguished by them . . . I comprehend!"

"You would have made a better solicitor than I," said Fillmore, with something like a smile. "Your cross-examination would be very damaging."

"We shall be all the better friends," rejoined the Marquise, good-humouredly. "Mr. Fillmore is charming," she added to Sir Francis, who had just returned from a promenade to the other end of the room, where he had been admiring himself in a looking-glass, under cover of smelling a vase of flowers on the mantelpiece.

"Ay, indeed, kindred spirits," said the baronet, nodding and smiling complacently. "But how is this, eh? May we hope to monopolise these privileges all the evening?"

"Here comes a rival," answered the Marquise, as the door opened, and Mr. Thomas Bendibow was ushered in. "I expect Mr. Philip Lancaster also. Do you know him, Mr. Fillmore? How do you do, Tom? What lovely flowers! For me? You are a *preux chevalier*; that is more than your papa ever did for me."

"You know I don't think of anything but you—well, I don't, by George! Oh, I say, don't you look ravishing to-night, Perdita!" exclaimed

this ingenuous youth. "I say, there ain't any other people coming, are there? I want to have you all to myself to-night."

"Tom, you are not to make love to your sister—before company!"

"Oh, sister be——! I know—you're going to flirt with that Lancaster fellow——"

"You have not told me if you know Mr. Lancaster?" said the Marquise, turning to Merton Fillmore.

"I have read his 'Sunshine of Revolt,'" replied the solicitor.

"Good Gad!" ejaculated Sir Francis, below his breath. He was gazing towards the doorway, in which several persons now appeared—the Lockhart party, in fact—and his ruddy visage became quite pallid.

The Marquise's beautiful eyes lighted up. She had had some secret doubts as to whether Lancaster would come, for she understood not a little of the intricacies of that gentleman's character; but here he was, and she felt that she had scored the first success in the encounter. To get the better of anyone, the first condition is to get him within your reach. But Perdita took care that the brightness of her eyes should not shine upon Philip too soon. She turned first upon Mrs. Lockhart and Marion. She had taken the former's measure at first sight, and knew how to make

her feel pleased and at ease. Marion was a more complex problem; but Marion did not know the world, and it was simple enough to disappoint her probable anticipation that the Marquise would at once monopolise Philip. The Marquise lost no time in introducing Philip to Mr. Fillmore, on the basis of the latter's having read "The Sunshine of Revolt," and left the two gentlemen to make friends or foes of each other as they might see fit. She then devoted herself to the two ladies, and incidentally to Mr. Grant, whom she had invited simply as a friend of theirs, and in whom she took no particular interest. Mr. Thomas Bendibow, considering himself slighted, strolled off into an adjoining room to indulge his wrongs over a glass of sherry. The baronet, who was almost manifestly labouring under some unusual embarrassment or emotion, attached himself, after some hesitation, to the Marquise's party, and endeavoured to monopolise the conversation of Mr. Grant. That gentleman, however, met his advances with a quiet reticence, which was beyond Sir Francis's skill to overcome. By degrees he found himself constrained to address himself more and more to Mrs. and Miss Lockhart, and Perdita, somewhat to her own surprise, was drawn more and more to look and speak to Mr. Grant. There was something

about him—in his old-fashioned but noticeable aspect, in his quiet, observant manner—in the things he said—that arrested the Marquise's attention in spite of herself. Here was a man who had seen and known something: a man—not a suit of clothes, with a series of set grimaces, attitudes, and phrases. Manhood had an invincible attraction for this lady, no matter what the guise in which it presented itself to her. At last she and Mr. Grant insensibly settled down to what was practically a *tête-à tête*.

"You must find it lonely here in England after so many years," she said.

"My exile is a cage of invisibility for me," answered Mr. Grant. "I find few to see and recognise me, but that does not prevent me from seeing and recognising much that is familiar. I find that England stands where it did, and is none the less homelike for having forgotten me. Indeed, one may say, without being cynical, that the memory of old friends is almost as pleasant as, and in some respects more convenient than, their presence would be."

The Marquise laughed. "I think your old friends might call that cynical, if they could hear it."

"You would recognise its truth in your own case," said Mr. Grant, half interrogatively.

She lifted her eyebrows, as if the remark required explanation.

"An old fellow like me sometimes knows more about the origins of the younger generation than they know themselves. I had the honour of your acquaintance when you were learning to say 'Papa', and wore little pink slippers."

"Ah!" murmured the Marquise, looking at him keenly. "Then——" she paused.

"And your father also," said Mr. Grant, in a low voice.

"Sir Francis Bendibow," said Perdita, after a pause.

Mr. Grant met her glance, and said nothing.

"Now I think of it," remarked Perdita, tapping her chin lightly with the handle of her fan, "I am inclined to agree with you. Memories may sometimes be more convenient than presence."

"It is not always the convenient that happens, however," rejoined the old gentleman. "And convenience itself may sometimes, on some accounts, be less desirable than an acceptance of facts. If Sir Francis Bendibow, let us say, had been suspected of a grave indiscretion in early life, and had in consequence disappeared from society, leaving his family behind him——"

"His family would probably, in the course of

time, become reconciled to his absence," interrupted Perdita, colouring slightly. "Human relationship is not so rigid and important a matter as romancers and sentimentalists try to make it out, Mr. Grant. As long as my child, or my husband, or my father continues to live within my sight and reach, I acknowledge myself the mother, wife, or daughter, and conduct myself accordingly. But if they vanish from my knowledge and remembrance, I learn to do without them, and they have no further concern with me. If they die, I shall not weep for them, and if they return, I shall not care for them. If I were more imaginative, or more inclined to feel my emotions to order, it might be otherwise. But it is my nature to feel my own emotions, and not other people's, and to see things as they are, and not as poetry pretends. My father, sir, is not the man who brought me into the world and then abandoned me, but—on the whole," she added, suddenly and completely changing her tone and manner, and speaking smilingly, "I prefer to say that I have no father at all, and want none."

Her speech had been more like that of a frigid and saturnine man, than like the utterance of a beautiful and youthful woman. Mr. Grant had listened to it attentively. He appeared to meditate

for a few moments after she had ceased. "I too have felt the force of circumstances, and should be the last to underrate it. Ambassadors, you know"—here he smiled a little—"are less deaf to the voice of reason than principals might be. I am entrusted with plenary powers, and may relinquish my side of the discussion definitively. I should regret my mission, were it not that it has obtained me a charming and valuable acquaintance"—here he bowed ceremoniously—"which I trust may continue. If I have annoyed you, be satisfied that I shall never subject you to the same annoyance again—nor to any other, I hope."

"I have made no disguise of my selfishness, you see," said the Marquise, with gaiety in her voice, but with a somewhat contradictory expression about her eyes and mouth. After a moment she went on, as if impelled, despite a certain reluctance; "But I am unselfish, too, as you will find out if you come to know me better. You will find out that I am not a daughter whom any parent with a sense of prudence and self-respect would put out his hand to reclaim." And hereupon the Marquise laughed, while tears sparkled for an instant on her eyelashes.

"What says our fair hostess?" called out the voice of Sir Francis Bendibow, from the other side

of the table, where he was conversing with the other two ladies, while his eyes and thoughts were elsewhere. "Should a man who loves two women give up both of them, or settle upon one? Come, ladies, the Marquise shall be our umpire—eh?"

"It is not a question for an umpire to decide," replied the Marquise. "Let the man put his case before the two women, and leave them to settle it between themselves."

"But we are supposing him to be an ordinary man, not a hero."

"Then, he would not find more than one woman to be in love with him."

"And it might turn out," remarked Marion, "that he was deceived in supposing himself capable of being really in love with anybody."

"If he were a hero, I'm sure he would not love more than one," said Mrs. Lockhart gently.

"Altogether, your problem appears to have been deprived of all its conditions," observed Fillmore, who, with Philip Lancaster, had approached during the discussion.

"A man who really loves one woman, finds in her all that is worth loving in all women," Lancaster said.

"A poet's eyes," remarked the Marquise, "create in the woman he loves, nine-tenths of what he sees there."

"And may blind him, for a time, to nine-tenths

more," was the poet's reply; at which everyone laughed except Mrs. Lockhart and Mr. Grant, but which very few understood.

After this, the company readjusted itself: the Marquise made Philip sit down and talk to her and Marion; and the three gradually got on very good terms with one another. Meanwhile, Sir Francis improved his opportunity to button-hole Fillmore, and drew him into the next room, where Mr. Thomas Bendibow was sitting, still in the sulks, behind a large pot of azaleas in the embrasure of the window.

"What did I tell you?" he exclaimed, hushing his voice, but with a vehement gesture. "Did you ever see anything like that fellow's assurance? Damn him, he was *tête-à-tête* with her for half an hour. Ten to one he's told her the whole thing."

"What thing?" inquired Fillmore composedly.

"Why, that he's her father, and——"

"Well, since he is her father, I know of no law to prevent him saying so."

"Damme, no, if that were all: but how do I know what pack of lies he may have been telling her about me——"

"Come, Bendibow, don't be a fool. If I were you, I shouldn't mind what lies he told about me, so long as I was sure that no truth he might tell

would do me any harm. Besides, Mr. Grant, or whatever his name is, does not look to me like a scoundrel or a liar. And the Marquise does not seem to be a lady likely to let herself be imposed upon, or to act imprudently. You have not been open with me about this matter, Sir Francis. You are afraid to act against this man, and you are concealing the reason from me. I don't ask it, and I don't want to know it. But I am not going to undertake anything in the dark. You must manage the affair without my co-operation. You should have known me well enough never to have invited it."

Several expressions—of anger, of dismay, of perplexity—had passed across the baronet's features while Fillmore was speaking; but at the end he laughed good-humouredly, and put his hand for a moment on the other's shoulder.

"If I were to live with you, day in and day out," he said, "you'd make either a saint or a devil of me before six weeks were over. You have the most irritating way with you, begad, that ever I came across. But I know you're a good fellow, and I shan't be angry. You might allow me a little natural exasperation at seeing things go topsy-turvy——never mind! I believe you're right about Perdita, too; she's no sentimental fool! Dare say matters will

come out all right, after all. There! we'll think more about it. I'll talk it over quietly with Grantley—with Grant, you know—ah! Here we are!"

The Marquise, leaning on the arm of Mr. Grant, and followed by the rest of the company, was entering the room, being come in quest of supper, which was to be served here, and of which the sherry, whereof Mr. Thomas Bendibow had already partaken, was but an accessory. The Marquise rallied the baronet on his lack of gallantry in not having been on hand to do his part in escorting someone; and they all took their places at table with much gaiety and good-humour; Mr. Thomas having watched his opportunity, when no one was looking in his direction, to emerge from the shelter of the azaleas and take his seat with the rest. His aspect was so dazed and distraught as to suggest the suspicion that the sherry had been exceptionally potent; only it so happened that no one noticed. His sulkiness had vanished; but from time to time he turned his eyes on Mr. Grant with a secret expression of consternation and bewilderment, which, considering the peaceful and inoffensive aspect of that gentleman, seemed rather gratuitous.

There were more gentlemen than ladies present, and Mr. Grant changed to have Mr. Gillmore

for his left-hand neighbour, and presently fell into talk with him. "I have heard your name mentioned," he remarked at length, "by my friend Mrs. Lockhart. You are, I believe, a member of the legal profession?"

Fillmore inclined his head in assent.

"There are some affairs of mine which need putting in order," continued Mr. Grant. "and as they may require a good deal of judgment for their proper disposition, I had been thinking of applying to you for assistance. Will you pardon me for taking advantage of this unexpected opportunity to mention the matter to you?"

"I am obliged to you, sir. You are, perhaps, aware," added the lawyer, turning so as to look his interlocutor directly in the face, "that I have for several years been legal adviser to Sir Francis Bendibow?"

"Yes, yes; to tell the truth, I was partly influenced by that also," replied the old man quietly. "Sir Francis will doubtless tell you that he and I are old acquaintances: and——in short, then, I may request you to appoint a time for our interview?"

Fillmore named a day near the end of the following week; and then relapsed into silence, being fairly taken by surprise, and unable to make

the joints of his puzzle fit together. Mr. Grant and the Marquise were both enigmas in different ways, and worth being studied. After a while, however, he decided that the Marquise was the more inviting, if not the more difficult, enigma of the two; and he experienced an unusual degree of pleasure in keeping his eyes upon her. He was not inclined to think that anything would be gained by her leaving London.

She was in a very brilliant and fascinating humour; her talk was witty and entertaining beyond what is common even with clever women. Indeed, one who had known her well might have fancied that her vivacity was the indication of some excitement, which perhaps had its origin in something less enjoyable than the lustre of the wax candles on the walls and table. Philip Lancaster no doubt knew the Marquise better than did anyone else in that room; but if he saw more in her behaviour than the others did, it is likely that he accounted for it on erroneous grounds. He did not notice that, although she glanced frequently at Mr. Grant, yet that gentleman was the only person at table whom she never addressed. But Philip, in fact, was too much occupied with his own affairs to devote much time to general observation. He was sitting next to Marion, who had young Mr. Bendibow

for her neighbour on the other side. Marion, after making several quite ineffectual attempts to draw the latter into conversation, was at length obliged to listen to Philip; and, he fancied, less unconciliatingly than of late. The events of the evening had been rather different from Philip's anticipation. He had come burdened with a saturnine resolve to offer some deliberate slight to his hostess, by way of improving his position in the eyes of his lady-love; but—whether most to his relief or to his disappointment it would be hard to say—the Marquise had given him no opportunity. Save for one ambiguous remark—to which he had made a prompt rejoinder—she had throughout had the air of bringing him and Marion together, and desiring their felicity. When she had addressed him, which had been but seldom, it had been on literary or indifferent subjects. Philip was not so pig-headed as to fail to perceive that the Marquise might make herself an exceedingly agreeable and even advantageous friend. If she were willing to forget the past, all might be right and pleasant in the future. His gloomy thoughts were considerably lightened by these reflections; and yet, somewhere in the back scenery of his mind, there may have been a faint shadow of resentment at something—for Philip, in spite of his superior poetic and

intellectual endowments, was not much more than human, after all.

He could not know that the Marquise, also, had found the course of events different from what she had expected. She had aimed her party at Philip, but had started quite other game. Nevertheless, her object as regarded Philip had accomplished itself quite as well as if she had been able to pursue it in her own way. He had received the impression which she wished, and she had had the opportunity of estimating the degree of influence which Marion had over him. That was all she desired at the moment. As for the other affair, although she had answered Mr. Grant explicitly and decidedly enough, she was less decided in her own mind; she meant to think it over by herself, and to modify her course should that seem ultimately advisable. There was no need to hurry herself about it; she would have ample opportunities for renewing her conversation with Mr. Grant whenever she wanted to do so. To discover a father after so many years was at least an excitement and an adventure; and, if Mr. Grant were really able to bring about such a meeting, it might be worth while to permit it. But then it was desirable, in the first place, to find out what manner of man this father was. Perdita, on questioning

her memory, could not form even the vaguest image of him. She had let herself forget him easily, and it was now too late to recall him.

Upon the whole, destiny seemed to be in an interesting and not unamiable mood. In reality, destiny had never been more sardonically pregnant as regarded every one of those assembled in the Marquise's dining-room, than on that evening.

CHAPTER XVI.

It came to the knowledge of Sir Francis, during the ensuing week, that Mr. Grant was going to have a business interview with Fillmore. He thereupon took pen and paper, and wrote Mr. Grant a very polite note. He said that he had been thinking over their relations with each other, and had come to certain conclusions thereon, which he wished to communicate to Mr. Grant, in the confident belief that Mr. Grant would not find them distasteful. To do this by letter, however, would be, for several reasons, inexpedient; word of mouth, in matters of this kind, was a more convenient and flexible way of coming to an under-

standing. Sir Francis went on to say that he possessed a villa in Twickenham, whither he occasionally repaired during the summer to get a breath of fresh air. It chanced that he had arranged to drive out to this villa on the afternoon of Friday next; and, if Mr. Grant did not object, he would call for him on the way at any place which Mr. Grant would please to indicate. They would dine together at the villa, and Sir Francis would then provide his friend with a horse to ride home on. Hoping for a favourable reply, he had the honour to be Mr. Grant's faithful friend and servant, Francis Bendibow.

Mr. Grant replied by return of post that he would be happy to accept Sir Francis Bendibow's invitation, and that Sir Francis might call for him at four o'clock at the chambers of Mr. Fillmore in the City.

When Sir Francis read this answer, he flushed up to the roots of his hair, and sat quite still in his chair, staring fixedly at the letter which he held in his hand, and breathing in a laboured and irregular manner. Presently the colour faded out of his face, and he became extremely pale, and his hands cold. He rang the bell, and told the servant to bring him a decanter of wine, the

greater part of which he drank, though it wanted but an hour of dinner. But the baronet had been in a nervous and anxious state for several days past; he had been worried, probably, by some of the exigencies and disappointments which are inseparable even from the most sagaciously conducted business; and he had moreover been seriously harassed by the odd behaviour of his son Thomas, who, since the night of the Marquise's party, had not been behaving like himself. He had been moody, reticent, and inactive; had attended no cock-fights or rat-catchings; had foregone his customary horseback exercise, and had even gone so far as to refuse to drink more than half his usual quantity of wine. When his father addressed him, he had replied curtly and evasively; and yet Sir Francis had several times detected his son in the act of watching him with a very intent and peculiar expression. What was the matter with him? Had he contracted a secret marriage? or had he suffered a disappointment in love? or had he been losing money at play? These questions, which the baronet could not, and his son evidently would not, answer, occasioned the former a good deal of disquietude. But all this would scarcely account for his vivid emotion at the receipt of so commonplace a thing as an acceptance

of an invitation. Had he expected Mr. Grant to refuse?

On the forenoon of Friday, Mr. Grant put into his pocket a leathern wallet containing a variety of papers, and betook himself to the City. Previous to starting he had a short colloquy with Marion.

"I shall not return until after you are all in bed and asleep," he said. "You must on no account sit up or keep awake for me."

"What are you going to do?" inquired Marion, point-blank.

"Something which will perhaps give you a chance to display your magnanimity," Mr. Grant answered with a smile.

The girl gave him a deep and somewhat troubled look.

"I shall be glad when there are no more mysteries," she said. "Nothing good comes of them."

"It depends in some measure upon yourself how soon this mystery is dissipated," returned Mr. Grant. "Have you no mysteries of your own?"

"Oh, housekeeping mysteries—how to boil a potato, or starch a frill; I shall never have any

other kind," answered Marion with a laugh, and turning away.

"To-morrow," said Mr. Grant after a pause, "you and I will have a chat about mysteries, and perhaps we may clear each other up. Good-bye, my dear!" He took her hand, and drawing her a little towards him, kissed her cheek. She looked at him, reddening, and said:

"Be careful of yourself. Good-bye!"

"Proud and jealous," said the old gentleman to himself, as he marched down the street to the corner where the coach passed; "but we shall circumvent that, I hope. What is the use of my twenty thousand pounds, if she will not be my daughter? But there is commonsense at the bottom of Philip's romance, that will counteract and persuade stubbornness—if it comes to that."

The coach came along, and in due time landed Mr. Grant in the City; and ten minutes later he had entered Merton Fillmore's private office, which had witnessed many singular revelations, but none more so, perhaps, than the one which was now going to take place.

"Good day, sir," said the lawyer, rising ceremoniously as his visitor entered. "Is your business likely to occupy us long?"

"It chiefly concerns the drawing-up of my

will," replied Mr. Grant. "And since the dispositions that I wish to make are somewhat precise and complicated, we may as well put the limit at not less than two hours."

"I am at your disposal, then, until four o'clock." Here Fillmore took out some blank sheets of paper, which he placed before him on the desk. Resting his hands upon these, with the tips of the fingers meeting each other, he fixed his eyes upon Mr. Grant and said slowly:—

"Before we begin, I wish to put one question to you. You will, of course, decide whether or not it be worth your while to answer it."

"I am at your service," said the other courteously.

Fillmore paused a moment, looking down at his hands. Then, raising his head, he asked abruptly, "What is your name?"

"I had intended to inform you on that point as soon as the occasion required," answered the old man quietly. "The name by which I have chosen to be known here is not mine. I am Charles John Grantley. My father was Thomas Grantley, of whom you have doubtless heard."

Fillmore leaned back in his chair and stroked his chin. Presently he said, "Sir Francis Bendibow spoke to me regarding your identity a few weeks

ago; and, taking all the circumstances into consideration, I own that I shared the surprise he seemed to feel at your reappearance in England."

"I can understand that," was the composed reply; "but it has always been my intention to end my days in my native land."

"It seems you have amassed a fortune during the interval?"

"I have laid by some twenty thousand pounds."

"Which you now propose to dispose of by will?"

"With your assistance, sir."

"You are a man of the world, Mr. Grantley, and acquainted with the general rules by which society is regulated. I cannot suppose you to be ignorant that a person in the peculiar position which you are understood to occupy might find it difficult to establish a claim to this or any other property."

"I shall not affect to misapprehend your meaning, sir," returned the old gentleman, with a manner of grave kindliness; "and I will answer you with as much openness as justice to myself and others allows. I left England twenty years ago under a cloud of disaster and contumely. I chose exile in preference to inquiry, and the

results which such an inquiry would produce. My reasons for taking that course I did not disclose then, nor shall I willingly do so now. I do not apprehend that I shall be called upon to alter this purpose; but, should it turn out otherwise, I have the means to meet the emergency, and I shall know how to use them." Here he laid his right hand upon the leathern pocket-book which he had placed upon the table. "It is far from being my wish, however," he continued, "to become the occasion of any disturbance or controversy. I rather desire that such small influence as I may still be able to exercise over my fellow-beings may be in the direction of making some of them happy."

"Am I to infer that you contemplate anything in the way of restitution?" the lawyer demanded.

"No."

"You are quite right, of course, in withholding your confidence," rejoined the other, with a coldness that was partly assumed to veil his perplexity. "But——is it your intention to present yourself hereafter under your true name?"

"There is only one other person, besides yourself, to whom it was necessary I should declare myself—I mean Sir Francis Bendibow;

and I took an early opportunity of doing so. To the rest of the world I intend at present to be Mr. Grant. The fulfilment of the bequests of my will may hereafter necessitate the revelation of who I really am; but I trust that may not occur during my lifetime. And, even in the alternative event, I doubt not the revelation could be so managed as not to incommode anyone."

"Well, Mr. Grantley," said the lawyer, taking up a pen and turning it between his fingers, "your attitude is unexpected and, so far as my information would lead me to judge, unaccountable. But that is none of my affair. I need only put it to you whether you feel so secure in that attitude as to warrant a belief that the directions of your will have a reasonable chance of getting themselves fulfilled—whether you feel confident that third parties may not interfere to thwart your intentions?"

"On that point I have no misgivings whatever," replied Mr. Grantley, with a slight smile. "My only apprehension would respect the principal legatee."

"I will not attempt to understand you," said Fillmore, smiling also. "If you please, we will proceed to the particulars."

Hereupon the two entered upon a prolonged

discussion, into which we shall not be obliged to follow them; since what is of import in it will appear in its proper place. At a few minutes after four o'clock the colloquy ended, and Mr. Grant, after shaking hands very cordially with the lawyer, bade him farewell and went downstairs.

CHAPTER XVII.

When Mr. Grant got to the door of the building, he found Sir Francis Bendibow awaiting him there in a small but stylish turn-out with two horses. He took his seat beside Sir Francis on the box, and the footman sat behind, with his arms folded. In this fashion they drove westward.

The baronet knew how to make himself an entaining companion, and he made himself one on this occasion. He talked volubly and genially, giving his companion all the gossip of the society of that day, which, somehow, seems to have been more amusing and eventful, and to have possessed more character and variety, than is the case in our times. The footman with folded arms had often listened to his master's conversational sallies, but had never heard him so agreeable as on the

present occasion, and inferred that the gentleman, his companion, who said very little, but whose manner was courteous and attentive, must either be a particular friend of his master's, or else some one from whom he had received or was anticipating a favour. "We should see more of each other, you know, Grant," the baronet observed with heartiness. "A man makes a lot of acquaintances as he moves on in the world; but, damme, there are no friends like the friends of one's youth, after all. No friend has been more often in my thoughts during the last twenty years than you have been; and good reason, too!" To which, and to much more of the same tendency, Mr. Grant responded by a few words of grave and composed politeness. Altogether it was a very amicable drive; and the weather and the roads were all that could be desired.

Their way led through Richmond, and across the gray stone bridge that divides that town from the parish of Twickenham. "When you ride home to-night," said Sir Francis, "you'll find it an agreeable change to follow the Isleworth road, on the west bank of the river, and cross by Brentford Bridge. Mighty pretty, quiet stretch, and only a trifle longer, if at all." The footman could have told exactly how much farther it was; but,

of course, held his peace, as he would have done had the baronet affirmed it to be two miles shorter. Still bowling easily westward, the horses tramped through the narrow winding street of a sleepy little town, wearied out, as it were, with the burden of its historic associations, and drew up at last before a wrought iron gateway in a high brick wall, the bricks cemented with green moss and covered with ivy. The gate having been promptly thrown open by the alert footman, the horses tramped through it, and up the gravelled curve of a drive, overshadowed with fragrant lime-trees, until their driver pulled them up before the gabled portal of an elderly but comfortable and solid-looking edifice, faced with white plaster, and dignified by far-projecting eaves. Tossing the reins to the man, Sir Francis got actively down, and assisted his friend to alight. They entered the house arm in arm. A large, cool, shadowy hall received them: beyond, a broad staircase, and opening inward to the right of it, a vista of a spacious drawing-room, with windows opening upon a verandah and a rich lawn at the back of the house.

"Serve dinner at six sharp," said Sir Francis to the obeisant butler. "Now, my dear Grant, there's to be no ceremony here, you know: but

I remember your fastidious habits. If you want to wash your hands, give yourself the trouble to follow me upstairs, and I think you will find everything arranged to make you comfortable."

"Uncommon civil the guv'nor is to-day," remarked the butler to the footman, when the two gentlemen had disappeared in the upper regions. "Who *his* Mr. Grant, I'd like ter know?"

"Ha! you may arsk that, Mr. Tuppin," returned the footman, with airs of superior knowledge. "You may arsk that, and no blame to yer."

"Well, I does hax it," answered Mr. Tuppin, brusquely; "not that I supposes you can tell me anything about it, neither!"

"Ha! per-raps not," retorted the footman, abandoning the vagueness of mystery for the definiteness of imagination. "Per-raps I didn't 'ear 'em conversin' as we came along and the gent a-sayin' as 'ow he'd a 'arf a millium as he was wantin' to inwest, and could the bar'net adwise 'im on the subjeck; and the bar'net he says, says 'e, 'Why, if ten per cent. interest is any use to you, my dear friend,' says 'e, 'I fancies we can take it hoff yer 'ands and no questions arsked.' And the gent said as 'ow 'e'd think about it."

"Oh, that's the story, is it?" said Mr. Tupp'n, pushing up his eyebrows and turning down the corners of his mouth. "Well, I thought it might ha' been somethin' new. But as for that, my good fellow," he added, turning away indifferently, "Sir Francis was talkin' about it arter dinner no longer ago than day before yesterday. I 'eard 'im myself."

To this assertion the footman was unable to frame a reply; being undecided whether to credit his ears with miraculous inspiration, or to charge Mr. Tuppin with being a liar. The former course being the more agreeable both to his vanity and to his self-interest, he ended by adopting it.

Dinner, instead of being served in the dining-room, which was in the front part of the house, and commanded no pleasant outlook, was laid out in the drawing-room, whence, through the open window, the friends could let their eyes wander out upon the expanse of silken turf, and the verdurous masses of whispering foliage. A sentiment of cultured and imperturbable repose was expressed by this quiet little region; not the vacant or helpless repose of wild nature; but the repose that comes of over-ripeness, or of containing more than can be uttered. The quaint ghosts of past times walked the deep smoothness

of the turf and lurked beneath the shadow of the trees.

"Other parts of the world are better to live in, perhaps, than England," remarked Mr. Grant; "but the place to die in is here."

"What's that? to die in? Time enough to talk of dying twenty years hence," exclaimed the the genial baronet.

"Twenty years is a long time to wait," replied the other meditatively. "The time to leave life is when you find it pleasant, but no longer necessary. My old interests are ended; I should not care to become absorbed in new ones. Not in this world, at all events."

The servant here entered with the after-dinner wines.

"We can't afford to lose you yet awhile, my dear friend," said the baronet heartily; "now that we have got you safely with us again, we mean to keep hold of you. What do you say to our finishing our wine out yonder on the lawn? Yes—Tuppin, take out the table and a couple of chairs. Such weather as this ought to be taken advantage of."

"And, by the way," he resumed, after the change had been made, and they had been left finally alone in their seclusion, "talking about

living in England--where do you propose actually to settle? Of course, I assume that you've no notion of remaining permanently in your present quarters—not even if you have designs on the widow—eh? Ha, ha!"

"Possibly not; but I have no other definite plans touching a dwelling," replied the other, fixing his eyes coldly on the baronet.

"To be sure, if your coming back to England was as unexpected to you as it was to us, your plans might well be a bit . . . undigested!"

"Why, as to that, I doubt if there was any moment during my absence when I did not cherish the purpose of returning; and 'tis at least a year ago that the date of my departure from India was fixed. What should happen on my arrival was, indeed, another question."

"Upon the whole, you know," said Sir Francis, crossing one leg over the other, and caressing his shapely thigh, "I rather wonder at your having remained so faithful to us. You were well enough placed in India, I suppose! Seems to me I'd have stayed there. What could you expect to find over here? One's acquaintances get pretty much used up in twenty years."

"I acted according to my feeling, as every one will do who acts freely. Considerations had

weight with me that might not have affected another in my place."

"Ah, I understand. The Marquise, eh? Parental affection, and all that! Well, does the Marquise reciprocate?"

The baronet's tone was somewhat strained in saying this, and his countenance wore a smile that was anxious and perfunctory rather than spontaneous and genial. But Mr. Grant appeared not to notice the alteration.

"I can't say I have been disappointed," he replied; "perhaps because I expected little. The little girl I left in your care has grown up to be a woman of the world, wealthy and fashionable, and naturally not much given to sentiment. She has fascination, ambition, and strong common sense: she is adventurous, quick-witted, and independent. I perceived the germ of these traits in her long ago; but I also saw—or so I fancied—a passionate and generous heart, which I believed would counterbalance whatever was dangerous in her other qualities. Doubtless it was this hope which partly influenced my determination to return to England."

"Ah! a passionate and generous heart . . . well! And may I inquire whether the lady fulfils your anticipations in that particular?"

Mr. Grant did not at once reply; but after

a while, with his eyes turned thoughtfully on the turf, he said slowly, "Making due allowance for accidents and circumstances, I don't think my estimate of Perdita was a mistaken one."

"Accept my congratulations then," rejoined Sir Francis, with a short and somewhat heavy laugh. Presently he added, "I am to understand, then, that in order to gain the sympathy of this passionate and generous heart, you have not spared the reputation of the lady's foster-father?"

Mr. Grant looked up quickly and keenly. "I made no such insinuation," said he.

"But you can't deny the fact?" rejoined the baronet sharply.

After a short silence Mr. Grant said, "I am not concerned either to deny or admit it."

"Well, well, you're quite right; there's no use disputing about it. And Fillmore—another sympathetic confident, I presume?"

"As a man of business, I found Mr. Fillmore everything I could wish."

"Ah! and who is to be next! I'm interested to know, you see, which are the persons who are henceforth to behold me in my true colours. Or perhaps you intend to be impartial in your favours, and publish the matter broadcast?" Sir Francis said all this with a kind of ghastly jocosity. "I

want to hear just what I'm to expect, you know. That's no more than fair, eh?"

"Does it not occur to you, Frank," said the other, turning fully towards him, while the colour rose in his face, "that what you are saying is extremely offensive? Has my past conduct towards you given you any grounds to adopt this tone to me? You try my temper, sir! I . . . I shall not, however, allow myself to be angry." By a manifest effort he in fact controlled his rising heat, and constrained himself to austere coldness.

As for the baronet, he appeared not to wish to provoke his guest any further. Either he was afraid of him—and there was a stern fire at the heart of the uniformly serene old gentleman which did not altogether encourage wanton experiment—or else there were other reasons why he desired rather to conciliate than to irritate him. "I expressed myself clumsily, Charles," he said; "'pon my honour, I meant nothing insulting. But, you see, a man wants to know how he stands—where he's to look for his enemies, and where for his friends. Now, we're not going to rake up the old matter between us, eh? For good or bad, that's done with. The wrong that was done can't be mended now; you can't mend it, nor can I; I would if I could, in a moment. Time has arranged

things after its own fashion. I did whatever I could for the wife and child, didn't I? I stuck to Perdita till she got a good husband! and then it was she left me, not I her. You . . . well, you made your way in the world; and perhaps, if all were known, you're in a better position to-day than you would have been if all this had never occurred. But your turning up so unexpectedly has put a new face on the affair—eh?"

"In what manner?"

"Why, in this way—but you mustn't mind my speaking out: we know each other well enough not to stand too much on ceremony, I suppose?"

"Say on, sir."

"I understand human nature as well as most men—I ought to, after my experience—and I don't expect too much of it—not even of you, my dear Charles. I can put myself in your place, and see things in your way. Quite right and natural that you should wish Perdita to feel towards you as a daughter would wish to feel towards her father. And, of course, as to Fillmore, it might be necessary, in transacting your business with him, to enter into certain explanations; for Fillmore has his crotchets, and isn't the man to go into anything he doesn't, in a certain way, approve of. But, allowing all that, I must consider my own

position as well. I'm compromised; and, taking into consideration my age and yours (not to mention other things), it makes me doocidly uneasy. I'm willing to believe you mean me no harm; but others might not be so considerate. I'm not half sure of Fillmore's goodwill; and as for Perdita . . . you can't trust a woman at the best of times."

"I wish to point out to you, Bendibow," interposed Mr. Grant, "that you are proceeding upon an assumption of your own. You assume that my daughter and Mr. Fillmore know our secret."

"Appearances sufficiently warrant that," said the other, with a dry laugh; "and, what is more, you have not denied it."

"No; I have neither denied nor affirmed it," returned Grant coldly.

"Quite right of you not to commit yourself. But passing that over—if you really intend me no mischief, it would relieve my mind to have some tangible proof and pledge of it."

"In the first place, have you had any occasion to suspect me of unfriendliness since my return here?

"Hm! nothing very definite, perhaps. But it would have seemed more amicable, for instance, if you'd deposited with us instead of with Childs."

"That is purely a matter of financial judgment. You cannot expect me, who know what your business practices are, to have the confidence in your financial orthodoxy that I have in Childs's. Moreover, I did leave a thousand pounds in your hands, precisely in order to avoid all occasion for remark."

"And if it were a hundred thousand, you might have it back again with interest to-morrow!" exclaimed Sir Francis, with some vehemence. "But that's not our subject," he continued, after a moment. "You have something in your possession which—if we're to be friends—you can have no objection to making over to me. You know what I mean."

"Do you mean the letter that you wrote me at the time of the——?"

"Never mind the details," interrupted the baronet, in a lowered tone. "Yes, that's it; that and the other papers . . . you know."

"I certainly shall not surrender them to you," said Grant with decision. "Your only use for them would be to destroy them. They are my only safeguard. My right to my own property, as well as my personal security, might depend upon them. You talk of mistrusting my goodwill. You would need to be a far more trustworthy

man than you have ever shown yourself, Frank Bendibow, before I would place myself so helplessly at your mercy."

"You won't let me have 'em, then?"

"On no account whatever. I am immovable upon that point. You remember that the possession of those papers was the condition of my acting as I did at the . . . twenty years ago. The same considerations that influenced me then have at least equal weight now. You must be content with some other pledge than that. But were you an honest man, you would ask no other pledge than my own word."

"Listen to me, Grantley," said the baronet in a husky and uneven voice; "I'll swear to you by all a man holds sacred, if you'll give those papers to me I'll never take advantage of you. I'll go down on my knees and take any oath you please—I'll do it at this moment if you say so. Think of it, man! Suppose anything were to happen to you—that you were to die suddenly, say. Those things would be found and read; and what should I—but it's not that—it's not myself I care about. If the worst comes to the worst, I shall know how to deal with myself. But there's that boy of mine—poor little fellow! I love him

better than my own soul, or anything else. I'd rather you shot me dead here where I sit than that he should ever think ill of his father. All I live for is to make him happy, and to leave him an honourable name and fair prospects. And if, after all I've hoped and done, he will get any wind of this——! I can't endure to think of it," exclaimed the baronet, his voice breaking.

"You're the same Frank Bendibow I knew in the old times," said the other sadly. "I cared a great deal for you then, and I don't know that I'm quite cured of it even yet. The worst about you is, you make yourself believe your own deceptions. I cannot do what you ask; I should risk interests and obligations which I can't discuss here. But I may be able to make some compromise with you. The papers might be given in trust to some third person in whom we both have confidence—to Fillmore, for example——"

"Fillmore be damned!" cried the baronet violently, striking the table with his fist, while his face flushed dark red. "I'll have no compromises; I'll trust neither you nor Fillmore nor anyone! How do I know what plot you may have been hatching against me this very day? Will you give me those papers or will you not? Yes or no?"

"I can only repeat that I will not," answered the baronet's guest gravely.

"Then!—— But, oh, for God's sake, Charley," said Bendibow, his tone abruptly changing from menace to entreaty, "think of my Tom. You're a father yourself; you——"

"Hadn't we better put an end to this?" interrupted the other, with an accent between compassion and scorn. "You need not fear for your boy, nor for yourself either. The papers are in no danger of being made public, except by my voluntary act; and it depends entirely upon you whether that ever becomes necessary. I always carry them upon my own person: they are in a sealed envelope, addressed to a friend, who, on receiving them, would, after taking certain precautions, destroy them. In case of my dying suddenly, therefore, your interests would suffer no detriment. That's all I have to say; and now, if you please, we'll dismiss the subject."

"You always carry them about with you?" repeated the baronet, in a muttering tone, his eyes averted.

"I have them on me now. Isn't it getting a little damp out here? My Indian experience makes me cautious."

"It's a cloudy night: there'll be no dew,"

responded the baronet absently. "Certainly, we'll go into the house. I have some curious old prints I should like you to look at. Stop a moment! I say, Charley, it's all right; it's all right, old fellow! I didn't mean anything. The fact is, my head is not always quite right, I believe. I get carried away—damme, I ask pardon if I've offended you. Shake hands with me, Charley!" He stretched out his hand and grasped the other's, which he shook hard and yet mechanically, then letting it drop abruptly. "Life's a queer business," he continued, with a laugh. "One gets cornered into doing things he wouldn't have fancied himself capable of; it's all circumstances—fate! I'm no worse and no better than others, as far as I can see. Come in—come to my study. The evening hasn't begun yet."

"I must be thinking of turning homewards. It will be a dark night."

"Nonsense; I shan't let you go before ten or eleven. Besides, the horse you're to ride won't be ready for a while yet. Come, now, else I'll think you bear me a grudge. You've had it all your own way, so far; you should give me my turn a bit now—eh?"

"I'll willingly stay a little longer, if you wish," said the guest courteously.

"That's right. I won't let you leave me with the idea that I'm a brute and a bully. We used to hit it off pretty well together in the old times. We'll have the old times over again for this one evening—eh? just as if nothing had happened."

And herewith Sir Francis quite threw aside his dejection and preoccupation, and became remarkably vivacious and agreeable. His guest had occasion to admire, more than once, the man's really great social and mental powers. Two or three hours passed rapidly. Then, all at once, Sir Francis complained of severe twinges of pain in his right leg and foot.

"That damned gout of mine!" he exclaimed ruefully. "Ah! ah! it's all up with me for the next day or two. Ah! may I trouble you to ring that bell? Tuppin—here, Tuppin, I've got another attack. See that everything in my room is ready. Whew! Well, old fellow, I'm sorry our evening should end so. Better luck next time."

"Can I carry any message to your physician?" asked Grant, who had risen to take his departure.

"Oh, no, I have everything here: and I shall have to fight it out—there's no hastening it. Ah! Good-bye, then, till our next meeting. Tuppin, see

that—ah! see that Mr. Grant's horse is brought to the door."

"The 'orse is quite ready, if you please, Sir Francis," Tuppin replied.

"Good-bye then, my dear Grant—good-bye. The lower road, you know, through Isleworth: the lower road, eh?"

"Yes, I know: good-bye, and a speedy recovery to you," answered the other; and with a kindly look at his suffering host, Mr. Grant left the room under the respectful guidance of Tuppin, and descended the stairs; and, having bestowed a gratuity upon the worthy butler, he mounted his horse, and rode away into the summer darkness.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IT now becomes our duty to follow for a while the fortunes of Mr. Thomas Bendibow. This honest and prosperous young gentleman, had he been as familiar with the text of Shakespeare as he was with those of some other dramatic authors, might have compared his plight to that of Prince Hamlet, when the noble Dane was in a state of collapse at the spectacle of the domestic revo-

lution which followed so hard upon his father's decease. Though never exceptionally dutiful in his filial relations, he had a genuine fondness for the author of his being, and allowed no liberties to be taken with his name and character by anyone besides himself. But since the reception at the house of the Marquise Desmoines, and the conversation that he had overheard there, his mental attitude had undergone a dolorous transformation. What were his other failings? Tom had always possessed the honesty and fearless candour that belonged to his idea of a gentleman, and had never thought of questioning his father's proficiency in the same virtues. Even now, he could not bring himself fully to adopt the inferences which obtruded themselves upon him. Further information might modify the aspect of the case. Nevertheless, an uncertainty as to whether the modification would be for the better or for the worse hindered the young gentleman from putting the matter to the test; moreover, he recoiled, when it came to the point, from directly questioning the baronet on a subject that seemed to involve the latter's honour. The degradation of such a situation would be mutual. Therefore poor Tom nursed his despondency in secret; when all at once it occurred to him, as an illumination from on

high, to seek sympathy, and perchance enlightenment, from the Marquise. He did not allow this inspiration time to cool, but proceeded to act upon it at once. With his ostensible purpose in visiting her may have mingled another, not the less dear because not openly avowed, and which we, as well as he, may leave to its own development. So, at about the hour when Mr. Grant and Merton Fillmore were having their interview in the lawyer's office, Thomas Bendibow, Esquire, caused himself to be announced to Madame Desmoines.

Perdita happened to be in a delightful humour. She had, indeed, a singularly even and cheerful temper, the result of an habitually good digestion, and of a general sense of the adequacy of her means to her ends. Yet she too had her moments of especial loveliness, and this was one of them. She was sitting in a chair by the window, with her hair drawn up on the top of her head, and arranged in flat curls on her forehead. She wore a thin black satin gown, charmingly disposed about the throat and shoulders; a book lay open on her lap, and in her white hands she idly held a piece of embroidery, on which she might be supposed to be at work; though in reality she had taken hardly a dozen stitches in it that afternoon. She was languorous and dreamy.

"Ah, Tom!" she said, stretching her arms above her head, and parting her smiling lips in a pretty yawn, "how pleasant to see you. Poor boy! my pleasure is your pain."

"Eh? Why do you say that?" he inquired, stopping midway in the ceremonious obeisance he was making.

"Your face said it first. So pale and sorrowful! Poor child, what is it?"

"I am not a child, Perdita," said Tom, with dignity.

"You are not civil, sir."

"Not civil—to you?"

"It is not civil to remind a lady of her age. I like to remember the time when you and I were children together, Tom, and to forget the years that have passed since then."

"Oh, to be sure! I didn't think of it in that way: and I hope you'll forgive me," said the youth, repentantly. "I wouldn't hurt your feelings for the world, Perdita—upon my soul, now, I wouldn't! But as to my being a child, you know . . . in a certain way I should like to be that—for your sake, I mean, so that you needn't imagine you're any older; but in another way—as a matter of fact, that is—of course I can't help being a man, and feeling it. And in that way, I should like to

have you feel it too: because what I feel for you isn't at all what a child would feel, don't you see: and . . . and I hope you understand me!"

"There is a good deal of feeling in what you say," returned the Marquise, with innocent gravity: "but I am not sure I understand what the feeling is about. Is it about yourself?"

"I don't believe," said Tom, with melancholy emphasis, "that there's a fellow alive who could feel anything about himself when he's with you: at least, except to feel that he felt . . ."

"There! See how mysterious you are. I'm afraid you're chaffing me," put in the lady, delivering Tom a glance that might have upset an ascetic of seventy.

"Oh! This is too bad—and I can't stand it," cried Mr. Bendibow, with a groan. Then he burst out: "It's you I feel about, Perdita! and I don't care who knows it! I've met lots of women in my life, and . . . all that sort of thing: but I never met a woman like you, and there isn't such another in the whole world: and if you would only . . . look here! Can't you feel that way for me? Oh, do!"

"Oh, Tom, is it really about me?" exclaimed the lovely Marquise, in the tenderest warble of a voice. She folded her hands in her lap and gazed

at him with a hesitating wonder; as if, in the first place, she had that instant realised the fact that such a person as herself existed; and, secondly, was struggling to comprehend so incredible a circumstance as that another person should exist who could regard her otherwise than with indifference. Miranda upon Setebos would have appeared a sophisticated woman of the world beside the Marquise at that moment.

Having allowed this shaft time to rankle, she proceeded: "But why do you ask me whether I feel for you? You know I love you, Tom: I have never tried to disguise it."

"You love me! Oh, Perdita!" cried the young gentleman, fairly breaking into a giggle of happiness.

"Of course I love you: how should I not?"

"But you know," said he, suddenly becoming grave with a momentary misgiving, "you know, I mean marrying—husband and wife, you know."

"Ah, well, now I do understand you," returned she, with a smile of radiant sympathy. "You mean to marry, and you are going to tell me all about it! Sit down here beside me and begin. Is she worthy of you, Tom? But first tell me her name!"

"Her name?" faltered Mr. Bendibow. "Why, it's you!"

"I must be very stupid," said the Marquise, with an air of perplexity. "I meant to ask you what was the name of the lady you intended to marry?"

"Don't I tell you, it's you? Who else could could it be, since we both love each other?"

"You, Thomas Bendibow, marry me!" she exclaimed, assuming an aspect of mingled amazement and indignation: and she added, with a tragic tone and gesture, "You are trifling with me, sir!"

"Upon my soul, Perdita, I never was further from trifling in my life," said the unhappy Thomas, quaking at he knew not what, while tears filled his eyes. "I mean an honest thing, and I mean it with all my heart. I can't think what you're so angry at."

"You have shocked me inexpressibly, Tom—shocked and grieved me. I really cannot attempt to express what you have made me suffer. You —my brother—the only brother I have ever had —to betray my confidence, and twist your sister's words in this way! I shall never trust another man as long as I live—no, never!"

"But I never thought of it in that way . . .

and, besides, you're not my sister at all!" cried Tom, from pale becoming very red. "You know very well that my father is no more yours than he is that fellow Lancaster's. If you don't want to have me, you ought to put it on some fairer ground than that. I've offered you the most a man can give to a woman, and I was in right dead earnest too; and I think you might take it so."

The Marquise, having played out the little comedy of the *ingénue* to her satisfaction, was now ready to deal with the matter on a less fanciful basis. "Sit down here, Tom," she said, "and look at me, my dear. Yes, I am a beautiful woman, and I am wise—at least ten times as wise as you will ever be, Tom; and I have seen the world—the great world; and . . . I'm a widow! All the finest gentlemen in Europe have made love to me. I knew you would be fancying you had lost your heart to me, too; and I wished, for both our sakes, to have the affair over as soon as possible. You could no more be my husband, my dear, than you could wear the moon on your watchchain. My husband—if I ever have another—will be a man wiser, stronger, and handsomer than I am; a man who can rule me with a word or a look; a king of men—and that

is more than a king of nations. How near do you come to being such a man as that? You and I might go to church together, and a priest might pronounce the marriage service over us; but it would take a great deal more than a priest and a marriage service, Tom, to make you and me man and wife! The man who can be my husband will have no need of forms of law and religion to keep me safe; though we would have those too," she added, with an odd smile, "because it's proper!"

"I know well I'm nothing very great, as yet, myself," said Tom, pulling up his stock, ruefully, and trying to maintain as manly a bearing as possible; "but loving a woman like you makes a fellow ever so much better, and more of a fellow, than he was before. If it hadn't been for that, I shouldn't have had the pluck, maybe, to say anything. But if you won't have me, Perdita, I suppose . . . I shall have . . . to do without you. And I wish I'd never been born! I beg your pardon—I think I'll go."

"No; I shall keep you here until you are happy," said Perdita, firmly, laying her hand on the youth's arm as he was about to rise. At her touch he subsided, helpless.

"There is something you'd enjoy much better

than being my husband," continued the Marquise, looking at him kindly; "and you'll have no rivals either. I need a brother, Tom; much more, perhaps, than I need a husband. I want a friend; no woman can be my friend, and no man, unless you will. Don't you think it might be pleasant to be my friend? Would you rather be that, or —nothing?"

"I don't know what I want, if I can't have you. I'm awfully miserable. Look here—I hope you won't marry any other fellow. I could stand anything but that. Well, I'll see if I can be your friend. Better break my heart with you than away from you, I suppose! Only I won't have you call me brother—that would be too desperate! Look here, do you know who your father is?"

"I know who he was."

"Well, he is still. He's back here. Don't you know? You were talking with him long enough the other day. Didn't he tell you?"

"Who do you mean?" demanded Perdita, lifting her head high, and looking at him intently.

"Why, old Grant, to be sure! Grantley's his real name, and he's your father."

Perdita looked aside, with a thoughtful expression, and presently said, "He didn't tell me that."

"Well, he is," Tom rejoined.

"Who told you so?"

"I heard my father and Merton Fillmore talking about it in the drawing-room. And that's what's been bothering me ever since. I hoped you'd know something about it. Because if he's the thief and scoundrel my father says he is, why don't they have him arrested? Instead of that, my father acts as if he was afraid of him. It's as if my father was the scoundrel, and Grantley the honest man. I don't like it a bit; but I won't ask my father about it—it wouldn't be decent."

"I see," murmured Perdita, meditating. "I wonder why he didn't tell me! It may be an imposture . . . but he could have no motive for that. Besides, he couldn't impose on Sir Francis. Yes, it does seem strange, Tom. Let me think!"

She leaned back in the chair, and folded and unfolded the work in her lap, with her eyes downcast. She had evidently forgotten all about Tom. That unfortunate youth sat staring at her with burning eyes. How little he cared about his father, or anything else, in comparison with her! And she would never be his! Tom suppressed a groan, and felt the hollowness of life. He longed to do something frantic, extraordinary,

heroic. Not to forget himself in dissipation—he loved her too truly for that; but to rise to the level of such a man as might worthily possess her. Since that happiness could never be his, to deserve it would be the next best thing. And perhaps, after all, no achievement could be so arduous and heroic as to be her friend—her true and unselfish friend. Some day she would esteem him at his true value and thank him. She should be made to feel that he was not a child, and that he was something more than a brother. Here upon Tom felt an aching in his throat, and two tears trickled down his face; he surreptitiously wiped them away.

"Will you do something for me, my dear?" said Perdita, looking up.

Tom nodded, not wishing, just at that moment, to trust his voice.

"This thing will have to be cleared up some time," she continued, "and it might as well be now. You can help me already, you see. I can do nothing without you. You shall be my friend and my confidant. If that man is my father, I must see him again, and find out . . . whatever he has to tell me."

"What shall you do when you have found out?"

"Then we can consult together, since we are both interested."

"If there should be anything wrong about my father——"

"We will arrange to have it kept secret. Mr. Grant—or whoever he is—cannot profit by any public revelation; and I'm sure I wish Sir Francis nothing but good. I should have preferred not to have the matter come up at all; and I told Mr. Grant as much; but since others know it, I must; and it must be settled definitely."

"What shall we do?"

"You go to Mr. Grant and tell him . . . or stop! I'll write a note for you to take to him. You'll find him, I suppose, at the Lockhart's house in Hammersmith. Give the letter into his own hands. Will you do that for me?"

"I wish I could die for you, Perdita," was his reply, with a look of outward emphasis that made it impressive.

She glanced sidelong at him, and drew in her breath with a half-sigh. He was an honest fellow and loved her truly. Perhaps she was sorry, for a moment, that she could not love him. For it is the pleasure of fate to turn the affairs of lovers topsy-turvy; and even as redoutable a marquise as Perdita might one day find herself

discomfited in somewhat the same way that Tom was now. However, fate is fate, and cannot be defeated.

"I love myself too well to send you on any deadly errand," she said, following up the sight with a smile. "Shall I write the note now?"

"Yes, if you'll be so kind. My mare needs exercise, and I shall like to ride over to Hammersmith this evening. 'Tis not six o'clock yet."

So Perdita sat down and wrote her letter, and gave it to Tom, and also gave him her hand to kiss. But he said, "Not yet, if you please; I couldn't kiss it the right way."

Perdita said nothing. But after her rejected suitor departed, with her letter stowed away in the breast of his coat, she looked in the glass, and murmured, with a queer little laugh, "Is that a blush that I see!"

Tom marched home with a solemn and dignified air, and, having caused his mare to be saddled, he mounted her and set out for Hammersmith on the errand which, neither to him nor to Perdita, seemed to involve any deadly peril.

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